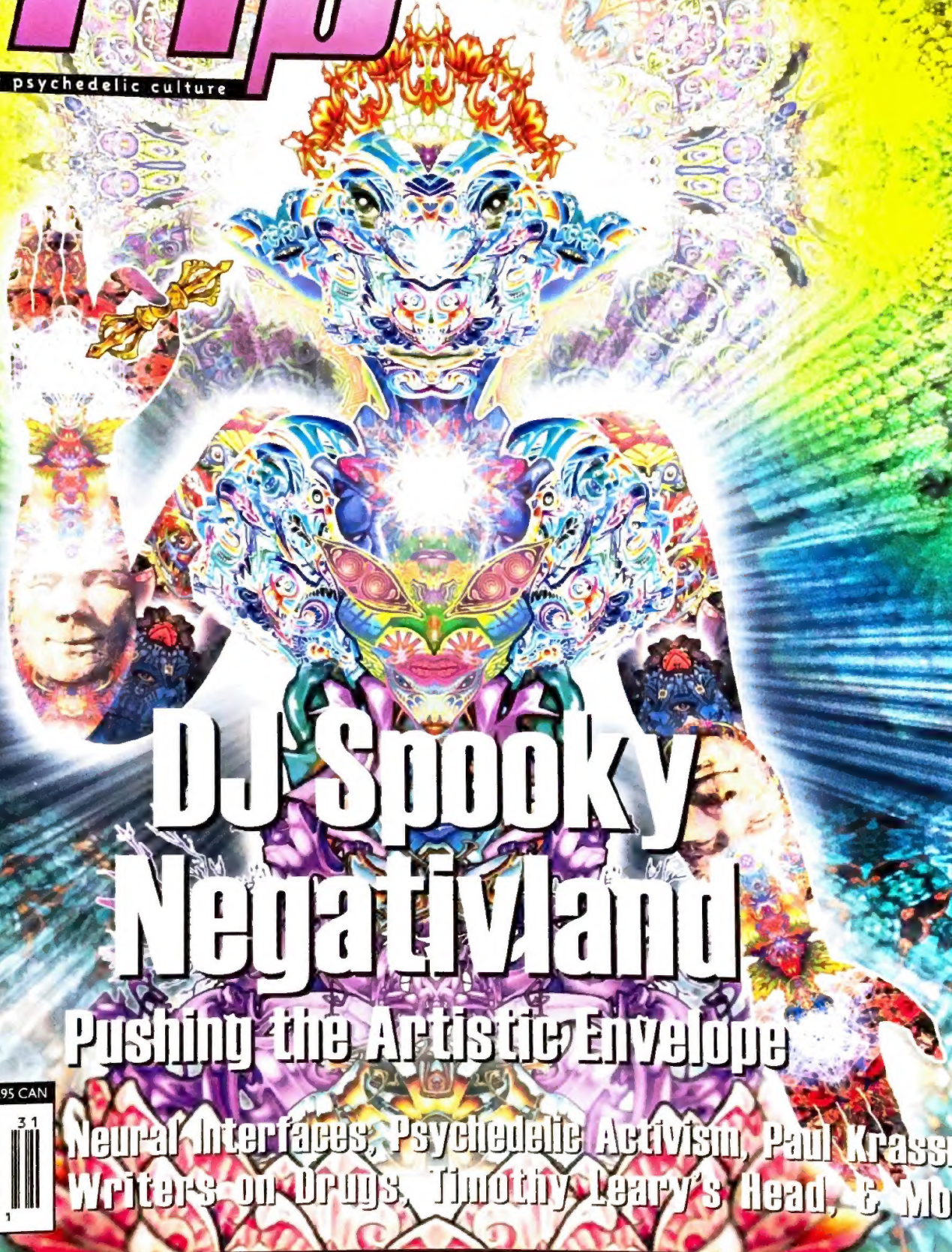


# trip

the journal of psychedelic culture



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# Editorial

## from the renegade files of Scotto

### It was 4 A.M. on a Sunday when I received the call on the hotline: Timothy Leary's head had escaped again.

Now I know this will raise many questions in your mind, so let me assure you: there is an easy explanation for why I was awake so early on a Sunday. The night before had been *Trip's* semi-annual "Praise Us, Your Lords and Masters!" staff party where James Kent and I allow our small army of fawning sycophants out of their shackles and into state of the art explosive collars, so that they may dance about the local Holiday Inn convention hall in celebration of the fact that we allow them to open *Trip's* insanely voluminous mail, copy edit *Trip's* astonishingly important pages, and occasionally watch an episode of *Buffy*. After the party, James and I had returned to our cavernous headquarters for a late night cocktail of datura-infused absinthe and several hundred pills we'd nicked from the purse of a blind woman on the bus.

I was, in fact, just getting a really good buzz on — or else, I had caught some kind of deadly tropical disease, I can't really be sure — when the hotline rang. It was my turn to answer the hotline; James got it last time and wound up having to spend three weeks in eastern Europe, settling a bloody squabble that had briefly — and terribly — interrupted the flow of black market drain cleaner into the country (remember, kids, intraocular injections are for professionals only!). I sighed heavily and picked up the phone as an army of small ants began swarming all over my skin, spelling out verses from the Book of Revelation, although with a lot more typos than I considered acceptable. I immediately recognized the voice of John Ashcroft, Attorney General of the United States, on the other end of the hotline. Strangely, he sounded considerably less drunk and panicked than usual. He must have taken my advice about the epidermal LSD patches, I decided.

"Scotto, we've got a problem," Ashcroft gurgled.

*Oh Christ, I thought, he's stalking the Solid Gold Dancers again.*

"It's not the Dancers — though how they continually manage to elude me defies my understanding," he went on. "No, it's a lot more serious. Leary's head has escaped again, and no one can find it. We've got our best people on this one, and all the leads are coming up dry. So Winky-poo—" President Bush prefers his staff refer to him as Winky-poo. —suggested we call you guys to see if there's anything you can do."

Well, that was irritating news. It had been extremely difficult capturing Leary's head the last time it escaped, requiring the use of several Special Forces units, specially modified aerosolized DMT weaponry, and a sophisticated trap involving a bevy of nekkid hippie chicks and the world's largest cheesecake. It would be much harder to catch him now that it knew our tricks — and besides, I'd just finished eating that fucking cheesecake.

I looked over at James, who was slowly dissolving into a multi-colored oil slick on the floor. He was certainly going to be of no use.

"I'll see what I can do," I said, "but my usual fee structure applies."

I could hear Ashcroft wetting his pants with joy. "As we expected: another hundred thousand vats of [deleted for security reasons] delivered to your lunar hideaway, Winky-poo will do another centerfold in your magazine, and we'll have Ari Fleischer beaten soundly about the head and shoulders again with those fruit cakes we got from the Prime Minister of Canada."

"See that you do," I replied.

I hung up the hotline, watched three lizard people slither out of the walls and ask me if I had accepted the Great Iguana as my personal savior, took another drink of the datura-infused absinthe, immediately regretted it, and then headed upstairs to the command center to ponder my options. My chum Crank Boy was on watch that night, where "on watch" means "scrawling a mad entheofascist manifesto while using *Trip's* satellite net connection to download 300,000 hours of tentacle porn and pretending to be a 12-year-old girl in an AOL chat room in order to line up another lifetime supply of cough syrup for the staff."

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#### About the cover:

*Divinitory Morphing Tapestries* by Luke Brown, a visionary artist from Sunshine Coast in British Columbia, Canada. He can be reached for praise and comments at [rabbit2012@hotmail.com](mailto:rabbit2012@hotmail.com).

The fear in his voice was unmistakable:

## "Good God, it's the Timothy Leary's head alarm! Leary's head is on the roof!"

"Oh, hey, Scotto," Crank Boy said nervously as he attempted to hide his notebook. I could only make out the sentence "Principle #4: Morning glory enemas are a privilege, not a right!" before the notebook slid out of view.

"Anything unusual going on tonight?" I asked.

Crank Boy shrugged. "Nope, it's been quiet. Completely quiet. Almost... too quiet."

Suddenly a loud klaxon sounded, and a big red light began flashing on the control panel. Crank Boy scrambled to investigate. The fear in his voice was unmistakable: "Good God, it's the Timothy Leary's head alarm! Leary's head is on the roof!"

I should have known. After all, I was the one who had masterminded the capture of Leary's head the last time. Naturally it would want revenge. I prayed the cast of *Dawson's Creek* would stop doing obscene things to each other inside my shirt pocket long enough for me to concentrate on capturing Leary's head once more... but somehow, knowing them, I didn't think that was likely.

"Wait here," I said to Crank Boy, who was already cowering behind the control panel like a school girl at a Young Republican convention. Then, slowly I ascended the elevator to the roof. A pleasant version of Paul McCartney's "My Love" was playing in the elevator, prompting me to vomit all over the walls several times.

The doors opened, and I found myself face to face once again with the horrible specter of Timothy Leary's head. After his "death" in 1996, Leary's body had been spirited away by freedom-loving entities from a parallel dimension, but his head had been subjected to a massive array of insidious CIA experiments. His head was now the picture of vicious psychedelic insanity as it floated in front of me, suspended by little rockets where its neck should have been.

"So, Mister O. Moore," Leary's head growled, "we meet again at last." A big, unseemly Irish grin spread across its face from cheek to cheek. "I suppose you're wondering how I managed to escape from the CIA's top secret, ultra-high security bunker deep beneath the Everglades!"

I shook my head and said, "Not really."

"Oh," Leary's head replied, taken aback. "Well, then—I suppose you're wondering about my diabolical plan for seeking my revenge and wreaking maniacal psychedelic havoc on the world!"

"Actually, no," I replied, "I wasn't."

Leary's head became downright cross. If there was one thing the CIA hadn't reprogrammed out of Leary's head, it was its insatiable need for attention.

"No, really, I think the only thing I'm wondering about," I said slowly, taking my time, letting the words form casually yet precisely as I stared into those vacuous yet strangely compelling eyes, "and it's kind of an academic question, really, but I figured you of all people's heads would know... is just exactly how many hits of acid can a person take without going completely crazy?"

His expression changed to a thoughtful kind of pride, a long buried part of his severed head thoroughly pleased to suddenly, after all these years, be asked a question about his life's work again. Only a moment or two passed before his reply.

"Just one," Leary's head said.

"That's what I thought," I replied ruefully.

Moments later, the floating head of Timothy Leary was swept up in a military style butterfly net at the end of a long steel handle — wielded by none other than James Kent, freshly sobered up and wearing one of his stylish "action" Cardigan sweaters. Leary's head barely protested; it knew when it had been beaten.

"Good work," James said. "I'll call Ashcroft back. Why don't you go whip up some of those mimosahuasca slurpies you were talking about earlier?"

I nodded. Leary's head viewed me mournfully as James took it inside. I stared into the night sky and wondered if maybe I should take out that single tab of blotter acid I'd had under my tongue continuously since 1992, and finally decided against it.

As most of our readers are no doubt aware by now, in the time since our last issue, Bob Wallace passed away (see [http://www.erowid.org/culture/characters/wallace\\_bob.shtml](http://www.erowid.org/culture/characters/wallace_bob.shtml)). Bob was an early and long time supporter of our magazine, and that was just one tiny part of his overall contribution to the psychedelic movement at large. Bob's presence will be sorely missed; the excellent example he set, hopefully, will not.

— Scotto, Editor in Chief

#### Correction:

In our last issue, we mistakenly referred to Daniel Pinchbeck's new book as *Breaking the Head*. It is, in fact, called *Breaking Open the Head: A Psychedelic Journey into the Heart of Contemporary Shamanism*, and we hope our mindless error doesn't prevent you from checking it out.

# Cognitive Liberty & Psychedelic Education

by me:me sous rature

Make your school an institute for *much* higher learning...

I woke up one morning in the summer of 1997, unemployed and recently graduated from college. Actually, I woke up several mornings during that summer, but what made this morning somewhat more special than the others was that I finally had a definite plan as to what I was going to do. I had been wondering for some time how I could get away with getting paid to do what I like to do most – unfortunately, my passion is not what you might call “officially approved,” and so my dream seemed futile, and a life of working for the Man under his rules inevitable... The problem was this: How To Get Paid to Get High?

The realization I had on that dateless summer morn was that the best way to get paid to ingest copious quantities of psychedelics and get away with it with blessings was to find the most outrageous way to do it: make the government employ me. The easiest way to do this would be to go to university, work on a BA and MA, and then get my PhD, all in cultural anthropology. Once this had been accomplished, I could then get tenure and work as a professor, taking leave from time to time to do “research” living with entheogen-using peoples in the Amazon, or wherever else fieldwork might take me – not only would I be getting paid to take drugs, the government would be paying my expenses! Haha! Now that the notion of work had been magically transformed into something palatable, I applied to the University of British Columbia, in Vancouver, Canada, got in, and started plugging away at anthropology. Unfortunately, by the end of the third year I became rather disenchanted with anthropology, along with the whole university system. Not one professor at UBC was willing or able to engage in any serious discussion

of psychedelics or their effects during classes (the same applied to the philosophy and psychology professors I encountered) – worse still, there was little opportunity to consider psychedelic-related issues in my papers. The idea

of a university stifling free inquiry disturbed me greatly, for I had always believed that universities were meant to be the last bastion of unfettered thought.

In September of 2000, UBC hosted a conference entitled *Illegal Drug Use in Europe and North America*. The panel members, ranging from European policy makers and the BC Health Minister, to police and activists, engaged in several days of complex and edifying discussions;

however, the title of the conference was rather misleading (although the majority of attendees did not seem to notice this), since the topics really all related to heroin and cocaine addiction, the problems surrounding such illnesses, and possible approaches to harm reduction. Whilst this was all very interesting, and indeed critical in a city such as Vancouver (we have a horrendously high death rate due to the combination of drugs, poverty, disease and political indifference here), it all seemed rather superficial in that (a) it did not wish to deal with the deeper issues, such as cognitive liberty, which is the issue underlying (or masked by) most current drug policies, and (b) it ignored a large portion of what are considered to be “illegal drugs,” only making occasional token references to psychedelics when they coincidentally appeared on overheads. This latter point is interesting in that it implies that either psychedelics are no longer of much interest to the law or the public (unlikely, given the status of such chemicals and the media’s and public’s preoccupation with “dangerous” rave culture); that

## PHILOSOPHY 486, 3 credits

This course is to be a general introduction to the issues surrounding psychoactives approached from the philosophical direction of cognitive liberty (i.e. of issues pertaining to mental freedom). We will begin the course by examining the subject of cognitive liberty, and then cover a wide range of psychedelic-related issues, including such topics as: possible dangers, religion, anthropology, psychology, psychedelics as educational tools, and the war on drugs - relating everything to cognitive liberty. The question to ask at all times is “What are we being protected from – allegedly dangerous substances, or our minds – and is this protection legitimate?”

nobody wishes to deal with such topics, for fear that they will not be taken seriously; that psychedelics are intentionally marginalized in order to avoid possibly valid criticisms concerning their status; or that most people involved in drug issues at the governmental and university level (not to mention those who are not) are generally uneducated about or uninterested in psychedelics.

Whichever of these it may be, it is critical that the validity and status of the beliefs, laws and practices concerning such a wide-ranging topic as psychedelic usage be open for mature discussion, and not left perpetually unnoticed and uncriticized on the sidelines. Had Galileo's "blasphemous" science been ignored by those interested in advancing the knowledge of our species, and had any further attempts at discussion been successfully suppressed, our world would be very different. The right to freedom of thought and discussion is at the very heart of the university ethos: can such an institution consider itself to be a serious and legitimate enterprise when it refuses to engage in the investigation of certain realms of human experience? To pretend that something does not exist is to tacitly admit to its reality, and is thus an intentional quashing of the fundamental human desire to understand. Academic freedom is a greatly revered concept: does it, I was left wondering, actually exist?

Although my original plan of being a psychedelic Indiana Jones had faded faster than cheap paint in the sun, my time in university was not to be wasted. At the end of my third year, someone on campus posted signs everywhere advertising a new program called "Student-Directed Seminars" – an opportunity for students to develop a course in a subject in which they are interested. Basically, if you had good enough grades, and knew enough about an interesting subject and thought you could lead a class in it, you could make a proposition to do so, and if accepted, run it in your final year. So long as the content of the course was different enough from anything else being taught (in order to avoid stepping on any sensitive professor's toes), and was both academically sound and rigorous, you had a chance. Finally, a calling! I thus set about creating a course, the final title of which was to be *Cognitive Liberty: Psychedelic Perspectives*. I did not really expect to be able to get away with my proposal, and was thus pleasantly surprised to find that although it did raise a few eyebrows on the committee charged with determining which courses were worth developing, I received the go-ahead. The main concern voiced was that it would be a polemical course where I would tell everyone to get high.

Aware of the fact that I was taking on a rather large task during my final year, I put out a call for help on the MAPS (Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies) mailing list. The participants on this list span a vast range of interests, and were the obvious choice of people to ask what they thought ought to be offered in a university level course (I had a lot of ideas brewing, and was well-versed in

the psychedelic literature, but wanted to make sure I was not going to miss something important). Within a few days, a slew of emails appeared in my inbox, all of which were useful in some way or other. Nearly half of the messages suggested I contact Dr. Tom Roberts, who had been running a course called *The Psychedelic Mindview* at Northern Illinois University. Tom's expertise turned out to be immensely helpful, as did the suggestions from MAPS' president Rick Doblin, the Center for Cognitive Liberty & Ethics, and Ken Tupper, an MA candidate at Simon Fraser University who was writing his thesis on the use of psychedelics as educational tools (Ken ended up sitting in for about half of the classes, providing a wealth of knowledge).

Once the course design was complete and approved, I had to find willing participants. As the course calendar had already been printed, all advertising had to be via the internet, posters and word-of-mouth. I put out the following description as bait:

**PHILOSOPHY 486, 3 credits:** This course is to be a general introduction to the issues surrounding psychoactives approached from the philosophical direction of cognitive liberty (i.e. of issues pertaining to mental freedom). We will begin the course by examining the subject of cognitive liberty, and then cover a wide range of psychedelic-related issues, including such topics as: possible dangers, religion, anthropology, psychology, psychedelics as educational tools, and the war on drugs – relating everything to cognitive liberty. The question to ask at all times is "What are we being protected from – allegedly dangerous substances, or our minds – and is this protection legitimate?"

The best class size for a student-directed seminar seems to be between eight and fifteen participants, as this allows for easy facilitation and discussion. Whereas many university classes are still based on the old-school factory-style authority-figure-in-front lecture format, the seminar program was designed to maximize the potential for group interaction and participation – it is well known that people learn information that they get actively involved with far more easily than facts tossed at them for passive consumption from the lectern. To ensure that the class would maintain a level of intelligent discussion throughout, interested parties were asked to explain why they wanted to be in the class, and how their presence might benefit the education of their classmates. Within a few weeks, an interesting multidisciplinary group had been assembled, and including myself, we were twelve. Although I had designed the course and was to facilitate it, I was also a participating student, and wanted to learn as much as possible from all the other members.

The course ran from January to April 2002, and the course was operated as much as possible on a non-hierarchic and democratic level. We decided what our assignments would be, and how to grade them. The syllabus was extremely

reading-heavy (our main texts were John Stuart Mills' *On Liberty*, Thomas B. Robert's anthology *Psychoactive Sacramentals*, Richard Glen Boire's *On Cognitive Liberty*, and Cheryl Pellerin's *Trips: How Hallucinogens Work in Your Brain*, all of which are excellent, plus many shorter articles and essays), so classes were all based on discussion group work, and the final assignment was to be a long paper on anything relevant to the course. At the end of the semester, we all had a week to read every other member's paper, then met to ask questions and discuss the works, and then submitted our grades for each, arriving at an average mark. An advantage of this method was that by critically reading everyone else's work, we vastly increased our respective knowledge bases – I think that it is unfortunate that in most classes one never has the opportunity to see what issues one's classmates are investigating, and what their positions are on their chosen subjects. As mentioned earlier, Ken Tupper appeared as a guest lecturer, as did *Trip* editor Scotto, who engaged us in a superb discussion about psychedelic communities. Being a part of this class was a blast, and I truly believe that I learned more in this class than I did from any other course I have taken in seven years of post-secondary education. Due to the fact that I graduated from UBC in April, I cannot run the course again (or a variant thereof) – however, if anyone wanted to run it again, or at another university, I would gladly provide my outline to work from or alter (my email address is [memesousrature@yahoo.com](mailto:memesousrature@yahoo.com) if you would like the syllabus).

## What are we being protected from: allegedly dangerous substances, or our minds?

One of the things that tends to make the last year of one's university career a little stressful is that nagging issue of *what to do* once one has that expensive little bit of paper called a degree. When I had become disenchanted with anthropology, I switched my major to philosophy, and had little hope of actually getting a job out of it. After four years of delicious bank loan living, I was faced with the old problem of how I was going to pay my rent again. I do not believe in performing a job that is merely functional, and wanted something I could learn from that would relate to my interests, not those of some ugly corporation that would recognize me by the name Slave Number 123. Fortunately, Ken Tupper had contacted his friends at the Center for Cognitive Liberty & Ethics (CCLE) to let them know that I was using their cognitive liberty meme as the basis of my course – this excited them enough to contact me and ask me to consider applying for their Summer Fellow position. Each summer the CCLE brings in someone to add to their dynamic for a period of three months, aiming to use their

skills and interests to further the idea that freedom of thought is a fundamental human right.

I applied, and was offered the job. My main task was to construct a course for the CCLE called *Cognitive Liberty & Neuroethics*, basing it loosely on the design of my previous class, and make it available to interested students and professors across North America. Although there are a few courses that touch on the freedom of thought issue, they tend to do so briefly, and fail to give it much attention. This one needed to be created in such a way that it would be both comprehensive and easy for people to run in their institutions if possible. The end result of the summer's work can be seen at <http://www.cognitiveliberty.org/proj/coglib.html> Here is a general description of the course:

"*Cognitive Liberty and Neuroethics* is a course designed to get people thinking, to entice them to think about their modes of thinking, and above all to take their ability to think seriously. With the acquisition of a critical understanding of the proposed subject matter, students will gain an understanding of how such things as technologies, laws, and social rules factor into – and thus shape – their lives. Questions concerning freedom and coercion have played a fundamental role in the development of our society; the rapid flow of technological advances that we are experiencing often overtakes society's ability to consider their implications in depth. Freedom and personal identity are being challenged on numerous fronts, and it is crucial that these issues be explored in a time when one's perception of self identity may be bought, sold and manipulated in numerous ways. Cognitive Liberty may be defined as 'the right of each individual to think independently, to use the full spectrum of his or her mind, and to engage in multiple modes of thought,' and is the basis of the rights conferred by the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution's Bill of Rights. The course engages students in an engaging investigation of the ethics and implications of current social trends and practices affecting freedom of thought and mental autonomy, and covers topics including philosophy, technology, law, drugs, media, surveillance and academic freedom."

The course nearly did not happen though – to put it politely, the people working for the U.S. Immigration services are bastards. After being given the wrong information about which visa I would need to get permission to work in the States three or four times, an officer admitted to me that they do their best to keep "aliens" out of their country, and often give intentionally false information. Getting across the border was hell, and trying to explain the concept of cognitive liberty to a guard whose vocabulary does not include the term "cognition" left me wondering just what it is that they are trying to protect. After a grueling twenty-four hour bus ride, I arrived in sunny Davis, California. As the summer progressed the wonderful oil-baron paranoiacs running the U.S. government imposed more and more counter-"terrorist" safety measures (read: violations of citizen's rights), made increasingly violent threats against

Iraq, and fought and won the right to urine test high school students participating in chess club. I must admit that I have, in all my travels, never felt less free than when I was in the States. A scary place indeed...

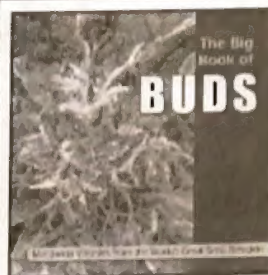
Fortunately, getting to meet everyone at the CCLE was a pleasure – Richard Glen Boire, Wrye Sententia, and Zara Gelsey made me feel very welcome, and made working over the summer a most enjoyable endeavor. Again, creating this course, and working in an environment of enthusiastic people, was a massive boost to my education – my comprehension of the issues surrounding and impinging upon cognitive liberty greatly improved. The reading list for the course was the hardest element to construct, because it involved searching for interesting readings to fit under each week's title, while trying to make sure that the course did not become too philosophy-heavy (my bias towards philosophical writings needed taming to make the course accessible and attractive to a wide range of people). Although the syllabus was put together in such a way that people could use it virtually instantly and at a low cost (most of the readings are available on the web), I opted to put too many readings in each section so that anyone running the class could have a bit more choice in the direction they wished to take it. This made for a rather heavy reading load for myself, as I had to read and sometimes edit a huge amount of material.

I would thoroughly recommend that any student at a university of college who wants to see something a little different being taught investigate the structure of their institution. The idea of for-credit student-directed seminars seems to be fairly new and progressive, so it may involve pressuring the main administration or heads of relevant academic departments either personally or via the help of student organizations. Above all, bring up the issues that interest you at any relevant opportunity in class. Discussing the mind in psychology or philosophy? Ask your professor how the theories stand in light of psychedelic research. Investigating the U.S. legal system? Demand an explanation from your teacher as to why freedom of thought is not widely considered to be the grounds for freedom of speech or religion, even though neither can genuinely exist without it. Ask, ask, ask. And if they don't know, ask them why they don't know. And if they do, find out more. This is what they are being paid for. Above all, don't be afraid to voice your opinion. Read as much as you can. Work out how your non-drug-related knowledge can be linked with your drug knowledge, and make use of this synthesis as much as possible. Anyone interested in contacting other students interested in psychedelics should sign up for the MAPS-students forum as well as the regular list (see <http://www.maps.org> for more info). If you are interested in applying for the CCLE's Summer Fellow position, visit [http://cognitiveliberty.org/summer\\_fellows/summer\\_fellow\\_details.htm](http://cognitiveliberty.org/summer_fellows/summer_fellow_details.htm).

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# Chatting with Paul Krassner

Interview by Thomas Lyttle



in 1961. Ten years later – five years after Lenny's death – Groucho Marx said, "I predict that in time Paul Krassner will wind up as the only live Lenny Bruce." Krassner calls himself an investigative satirist. He has published several humorous psychedelic books, written for many national magazines, appeared on television and radio talk shows, and produced a number of comedy CDs. In 2002, Barricade Books published his *Murder At the Conspiracy Convention (and Other American Absurdities)*, with a foreword by George Carlin.

When *People* called Paul Krassner "the father of the underground press," he immediately demanded a paternity test. Actually, Paul Krassner published *The Realist* from 1958 to 2001, with the motto, "Irreverence is our only sacred cow." He covered the antiwar movement, then co-founded the Yippies with Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin. He edited Lenny Bruce's autobiography, *How to Talk Dirty and Influence People*, and with Lenny's encouragement, became a stand-up comedian himself, opening at Art D'Lugoff's Village Gate in New York

**TRIP:** Tell us how you met Lenny Bruce and ended up editing his biography *How to Talk Dirty and Influence People*. Can you describe the editing scenarios – did you work in person or via letter? How long did it take to edit the manuscript?

PK: He was a subscriber to *The Realist*, and when he came to New York he called me and we met at his hotel and we developed a friendship. Later, *Playboy* assigned me to edit his autobiography, which they were going to serialize before publishing it as a book. Lenny wrote the book himself, but I had to draw the later material – especially the string of arrests – out of him. Sometimes he would dictate a scene while I wrote it down, other times I would transcribe a tape. So the book was not ghostwritten at all. I just helped structure it and made editorial suggestions along the way.

**What motivated you to write several books on mind-expanding drugs?**

Because I contribute a monthly column, "Brain Damage Control," for *High Times*, as well as occasional full length articles, much of my writing has been about psychoactive drugs, and it was only natural that those pieces would be included in my collections.

**How many of the drugs that you write about have you tried?**

Pot, acid, mescaline, psilocybin, DMT, Ecstasy and ketamine.

**Would you describe your experiences with magic mushrooms as magical?**

As for magic, although my religion is coincidence, one of the things I learned from psilocybin was that the line between magic and coincidence is getting blurrier and blurrier. One of my regrets in life is not getting a mushroom smoothie when I was in Amsterdam.

**Many of your friends from the 1960s have passed on. Could you tell us a couple of stories about your adventures with Tim Leary, Ken Kesey or other psychedelic elders – tales that never made it into your books?**

I once accompanied Leary to NBC where he was scheduled to be a guest on *Meet the Press*. He was basically a propagandist and wanted to spread the word about psychedelics. Before the show, he was pacing back and forth, holding a large envelope behind him. I learned later that it was because his pants had ripped and he wasn't wearing any underwear.

I once accompanied Ken Kesey on a trip to Mexico. He

was wearing a white suit and Panama hat. On the way there, the tire blew out, and he fixed it without getting a single stain on his clothes. We buried our marijuana stash before crossing the border, as though anybody would have tried to smuggle pot INTO Mexico.

**If you were to teach a class on the history of cognitive freedom, whom would you suggest we study?**

Robert Anton Wilson (to whom *Murder At The Conspiracy Convention* is dedicated), various semanticists, Lenny Bruce, Mae Brussels (the famous conspiracy researcher).

**Can you tell us a little about your new book *Murder At The Conspiracy Convention*?**

It's a collection of my investigative satire over the last few years, from the Clinton/Monica scandal to the war in Afghanistan. It includes profiles of such counter cultural icons as Jerry Garcia, Abbie Hoffman, Ram Dass, Ken Kesey, Peter McWilliams and Jack Herer. Also included are my misadventures at the Prophets Conference, the Neo-Pagan Festival, the Cannabis Cup, the Swingers convention and – of course – the Conspiracy Convention.

**Speaking of conspiracies, do you think the Illuminati really exist and are attempting to take over the world, like Robert Anton Wilson says?**

I don't know if they call themselves the Illuminati, but some conspiracy theorists think that we're in the end game now. The people who run the banks and the insurance companies certainly seem to wield an awful lot of power, and the urge to control is the urge to control, by any other name.

**Any comments on the World Trade Center attacks?**

I think it was inevitable, although I am deeply saddened that there is so much human suffering as a result of our nation's karma. But now we've joined the rest of the world, and can no longer take our safety for granted. A byproduct of the tragedy is that political opportunists are using it as an excuse to legalize police-state measures.

**You mention karma – do good and evil exist in the absolute sense?**

I don't think so, cosmically, but I believe moral values evolve along with everything else. Good and evil have both intensified, and technology serves both.

**Have you ever been censored? Have you ever wished that you'd been censored?**

I've been censored sometimes when I've written for the mainstream press. I can't think of any instances where I wish I'd been censored, or where I wished that I'd censored myself. There is a fine line between censorship and editing though.

**Has anyone ever threatened you over your ideas, writing or comedy?**

There have been threats over the years, but they were more venting than warning.

**Didn't the *Chicken Soup for the Soul* folks sue you over your psychedelic books?**

A few years ago I started collecting material for a book I planned to call *Funny Dope Stories*. However, not all the stories turned out to be funny, at least not funny ha-ha. Some were poignant, others were bizarre, but they were all true experiences. Although the tales told of encounters with a variety of plants and chemicals, in a shrewd marketing move the publisher, *High Times*' book division, decided to limit the material just to marijuana and to change the title to *Pot Stories For the Soul*. But who could have predicted that it would win a Firecracker Alternative Book Award and become a Quality Paperback Book of the Month Club selection?

Then came the sequel. I wanted to call it *Acid Trips For the Soul*. The distributor insisted on a different title – *Psychedelic Trips For the Soul* – that was fine with me. Although there was a great deal of material about all kinds of hallucinogens, I decided to include only the stories about LSD. Meanwhile, the publisher of *Chicken Soup For the Soul* threatened to sue *High Times* if they did not cease and desist. Thus, *Psychedelic Trips For the Soul* became *Psychedelic Trips For the Mind*. And the moral of this story is that, although the human soul cannot be located, it *can* be copyrighted. (However, a 20-year-old man did sell his soul on the Internet, auctioning it off to the highest bidder for \$400.)

So now I can present the third book of this trilogy – not *Magic Mushrooms For the Soul* as originally planned (and, who knows, that might have been changed to *Magic Mushrooms For the Body*) – but instead it's *Magic Mushrooms & Other Highs: From Toad Slime to Ecstasy*, featuring stories about anything folks have used to get high *except* for marijuana and acid. It's as though *Pot Stories* had been an amoeba which split in half to reproduce itself in the form of *Psychedelic Trips*, which in turn bifurcated to reproduce itself in the form of *Magic Mushrooms*. The stories in this book are told in a great many different voices with a wide variety of styles along the spectrum – from hilarious to frightening, from naive to sophisticated, from schmaltzy to jaded – but what all these contributors have in common is the fact that they have chosen to explore and enjoy their own inner space with substances that are not manufactured by corporations or advertised on TV by pharmaceutical pushers trying to persuade you to "Ask your doctor" for prescription drugs with deadly side effects. Incidentally, you may want to try licking the bottom right-hand corner of page 23. Go ahead, it's all right. No one will ever know.

*Thomas Lytle has written 8 books about psychedelics and over 100 book chapters, magazine and journal articles. He also works professionally as a gourmet chef, and lives in South Florida.*



# On Drugs

by Mark Pesce



Contributing editor Mark Pesce kicks off a look at the strange fusion of psychedelic awareness and the politics of war.

*"The first casualty of war is truth."*  
— Rudyard Kipling

*"Truth: The anti-drug"*  
— Partnership for a Drug-Free America

I come to preach to the choir. I know you've picked up this magazine to read this article, so you're already self-selected, eager and willing to read these words. Given this, it makes no sense for me to write anything that could change your mind on the subject of psychedelics, or drugs in general. Your mind is already made up. What remains, then, is more than the brainwashing of a clever argument, compellingly laid out; it is the first counteroffensive, an opening of a new front on the battle lines. The propaganda has it right: there

is a war on, and this is your call to arms.

If we so desired, we could spend a few thousand precious words on a historic recounting of the human fascination with chemical alterations in consciousness, speak to the breadth and universality of the trend, and of how it increasingly came into conflict with the ideals of Industrial Age culture, eventually becoming the whipping-boy for all sorts of social ills, from delinquency to petty theft to miscegenation. For the last hundred years we have been taught that drugs are bad. And so many believe.

But this is just dogma, spells spoken by a priestly class who, for their own purposes and to their own ends, have cast their own linguistic magic into the culture, concretizing social policy with their words. In *Schrödinger's Cat*, Robert Anton Wilson spells it out plainly: "Reality is the place where rival gangs of shamans fought to a standoff." The arbiters of culture are themselves shamans – consciously or no – crafting the rules and realities of society through the careful exercise of power, defining the frame for "rational" debate on "important" issues. The ability to control language imparts another capability – the control of reality itself. That much became clear in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, between the Italian Fascists (Mussolini began as a newspaperman), the Nazis (Goebbels perfected the modern art of propaganda), and the writings of George Orwell.

Language creates reality. Those who control language control what we define as "real." To undo the linguistic magic of the "war on drugs," a counter-spell is required. Fortunately, as the psychedelic vanguard – and you should pride yourselves as such, else why would you be reading *Trip?* – you are all shamans: some in training, some in practice, some perhaps in retirement. But the time has come to leave your cozy slumber, or finish your training: we need you. The whole world needs you. The war on drugs isn't being fought by governments against narcotics traffickers, although it is frequently presented within such a neat, black-and-white frame. The war on drugs is going on underneath your own skin, during your every waking moment.

The profound nature of the struggle within which we find ourselves engaged can not easily be overstated. The way we think of who we are, how we define our roles and expectations, whether we feel guilt or glory for our actions, none of these are called into being (or question) by forces outside ourselves. We are our own constant judge and jury, weighing each of our actions against an internal sense. That sense, whether or not we recognize it as such, is built up

from the linguistic magic of cultural construction. From the moment we learned the difference between good and bad (that which pleased or angered our parents) we have each been building intricate models of the "correctness" of our behavior, growing into socially adept beings who can navigate the peculiarities of culture by a careful obedience to the dictates of right and wrong, moral and immoral, legal and illegal.

Thus, we ourselves have crafted the "mind forg'd manacles" eloquently described by Blake, but we should not hold ourselves responsible for our imprisonment. Only recently have we come to understand the human drive to socialize is inherent, biological, and ultimately pervasive. We constantly internalize the linguistic assignments of culture, translating them into consensus reality. However, once we understand the nature of the cage that binds us – quite literally, the words which imprison us – it is incumbent upon us to undo the unconscious work of culture, and create something that we can consider wholly ourselves.

We must attempt to reformulate the essence of our thinking about psychedelics and drugs in general. We need to reprogram ourselves – not only for our own well-being, but also (and more importantly) so that each of us can become culture workers, reframing the language which so polarizes any discussion of drugs as to make it effectively impossible to broach the subject at all.

In this silence, we hide from view and feel vaguely ashamed that we have been open to experiences others might never live to enjoy. But the time has come to claim our experience as authentic, valuable, and, above all, reasonable. We are shamans, and this is war: we must not stop until we've reset the parameters of the real.

*Mark Pesce is the author of The Playful World: How Technology Is Transforming Our Imagination and the classic text VRML: Browsing and Building Cyberspace. He has written for Wired, Feed, and Salon.*



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# The Political Implications of Psychedelic Consciousness

by Charles Hayes

This essay is the text for a talk given at the Boom Festival at Adanha-a-Nova in northern Portugal on August 24, 2002. It is inspired by and contains some of the text from an article entitled "Is Taking a Psychedelic an Act of Sedition?" in the March/April 2002 issue of *Tikkun: A Bimonthly Jewish Critique of Politics, Culture and Society*, available in the archives of both *Tikkun* and AlterNet: <http://www.tikkun.org> and <http://www.alternet.org>. Charles Hayes is the editor of *Tripping: An Anthology of True-Life Psychedelic Adventures* (Penguin), and was interviewed in *Trip* #6.

Today I'm going to talk about some of the possible practical applications of psychedelic consciousness. The psychedelic experience offers a sort of 360-degree insight into the conscience, so there ought to be plenty of useful ethics that flow out of psychedelic people.

When the U.S. was attacked on 9/11, everything took on a whole new light (especially for those of us who live in New York), and some of the first questions that came to mind were "What would tripping be like after this?" Everything, including expanding your mind in private, now seemed politicized by the new reality.

I didn't lose anybody I knew in the attacks, but after the Pentagon was hit, I phoned my wife to tell her to get out of the U.N. building in New York, where she works. A few days later, bin Laden told his followers to add the U.N. to their list of jihad targets in retaliation for its cooperation in the global war on his brand of terrorism. Prior to the attack, my wife didn't have any life insurance, but she does now. Suddenly, the threat of politically-motivated violence was a reality for millions of us who couldn't imagine it before.

And suddenly all priorities and decisions had to be analyzed in terms of security, and in terms of political or military implications. What had formerly seemed trivial or apolitical now had to be reevaluated in terms of an apparently new paradigm of conflict.

How you view this new paradigm depends on your perspective, whether you're just looking out for your own ass or whether you're able to consider the whole picture. Of course, it's the job of governments to think parochially, in terms of their perceived national interests. And it's the job of free thinkers to transcend that sort of thinking.

Remembering how closely LSD was linked to the movement against the Vietnam War, I wondered aloud in a magazine article if taking a psychedelic in these times might be an act of sedition, a willful act of resistance against George W. Bush, Dick Cheney, John Ashcroft and the gang. Would people getting high on psychedelics make America an easier target? Would it erode our will to fight

our perceived enemies? Would we still be able to fulfill our patriotic duty in these frightening times if we took to the psychedelic skies?

Of course the very idea of going off on a hallucinogenic "head trip" in this hour of crisis might seem self-indulgent folly. If combat readiness is an issue for you, then I would say that this is definitely NOT a good time for you to trip. But if you, like me, are not really sure who the *real* enemy is, if you're inclined to ask more questions about the nature of the new reality that's now upon us, or if you're seeking healing from trauma or stress, this could very well be the time to venture out into new psychical frontiers by means of certain time-tested plants and chemicals. In fact, it might even be foolish not to, given that there might not be much time to lose.

So today I'm going to explore the political implications of psychedelics, where they may exist, and whether they even should. Psychedelics may lead to new values or the intensification of existing ones, but does it necessarily follow that these values or the psychedelic impulse behind them should translate into something as concrete and regimented as political activism?

Many believe that politics are absolutely toxic to psychedelic values. Yet there seems to be a great congregation taking place that is driven by the psychedelic spirit. This begs the question of whether this emergent community can be mobilized to serve in a cause beyond its own self-interest. Would it make sense to mount a political movement based on the compassion and communalism that is at the heart of the psychedelic experience?

Many would argue that psychedelics are best kept under the political radar, in the privacy of one's home, for the pursuit of one's personal cognitive liberty. Do we really want to form ideological ruts out of the psychedelic mindset, to fall into and out of line with? And do we really want to make the sort of public waves that could result in a reactionary backlash?

So today I'll identify some of the many often contradictory

faces of the politics of psychedelics: the politics that may be fostered by psychedelics, and the politics for and against the use of psychedelics.



effectively LSD could be used to terrorize and incapacitate adversaries and then extract secrets from them. They did this, of course, by grotesquely

### ***Psychedelics as Weapons of War***

On the question of sedition, my conclusion is that yes, in many respects taking psychedelics does lead to insurrection against the established order. And that's because psychedelics *are* a weapon of war, the war of perceptions, values, and priorities. More readily than the reverse, psychedelics can erode the will to use military force, so long as survival isn't at stake. And that's because psychedelics make any authority that isn't just or genuine look laughable.

Let's face it, there is something uniquely destructive about substances that kill the ego and dissolve boundaries to cognitive, emotional, and spiritual understanding.

And drugs have been used in warfare. During the Crusades, Saracen assassins toked hashish to get a glimpse of paradise before risking their lives on missions to assassinate Christian leaders. The CIA took a different tack — not to fortify their own soldiers but to incapacitate the enemy. After World War II, in the early years of the Cold War, they tested all kinds of mind-altering drugs as chemical weapons.

One of the first psychoactives they tried out was synthetic cannabis, which they considered a "truth drug" that instilled hilarity and talkativeness even in unsuspecting subjects. So they injected a colorless, odorless extract into cigarettes and mashed potatoes to get the enemy stoned and babbling his secrets. This was used with the assent of Harry Anslinger, America's first drug czar and the architect of global anti-cannabis legislation, whose propaganda condemned marijuana as the not-so-hilarious "assassin of youth." So we can see hypocrisy at the root of U.S. drug policy from the very beginning. Anslinger's hypocrisy and deceit knew no bounds. While rounding up jazz musicians for dope possession, he allowed the anti-Communist witch-hunting senator Joseph McCarthy to legally fill his prescription for daily morphine injections.

In a secret program called MK-ULTRA, the CIA used unwitting subjects, including Americans, to see how

manipulating the set and setting, using confinement and horrific mind games to make the experience sheer torture. One scientist even suggested using hallucinogenic gases on U.S. subways to test LSD as a way to wage war without killing anybody.

They found, however, that the results were too unpredictable. When some of the spies self-tested the stuff, they'd fly off on mystical experiences. One CIA operative, for instance, broke down and wept at the fraternity of man. The drug would act as a non-specific catalyst for processes within the psyche or social environment, which made interrogation messy and hysterical affairs that often yielded nothing of military value.

But they continued to toy with LSD for over a decade, believing there had to be some useful mischief they could get out of this volatile mind agent that quickly disappeared from the body without a trace. The CIA and the U.S. Army were intimately linked with the early use and spread of LSD, monitoring the work of researchers and users all over the world. Many who later became apostles for acid were first turned on in government labs, with white-coated scientists recording their every pupil dilation. Some historians believe that at the end of the Sixties LSD was dumped in massive quantities on the counterculture in an attempt to disrupt and discredit the movement by spreading the substance haphazardly far and wide where it didn't belong.

The idea of using drugs as a weapon never went away. In 1992, the government of South Africa manufactured MDMA for crowd control. They supposedly disposed of the stuff, but it's believed to have shown up on the black market. As Jon Hanna pointed out in yesterday's talk, the Department of Defense is now trying to buy up quantities of *Salvia divinorum*, perhaps for use as a chemical weapon.

It might be surprising, but on the other, supposedly progressive side of the political spectrum, and for a slightly different purpose, LSD evangelists have also contemplated dosing unwitting subjects in hopes of transforming their politics. In expressing his opposition to the NATO bombing of Serbia, Ken Kesey suggested that we drop acid on 'em to

get them to knock off their violence against the Kosovar Albanians.

Grace Slick, singer for the Jefferson Airplane, showed up with activist Abbie Hoffman at a White House tea party, where they planned to slip 600 micrograms of acid into President Nixon's teacup. The plot was foiled when security guards recognized her and denied her entrance, even though she had an invitation. She was on the FBI list apparently because of the drug lyrics in some of her songs.

So the moral issue of using drugs as weapons applies across the political spectrum. It certainly would have been more humane to drop LSD rather than bombs on the Serbs, but would it have been the right thing to do? Would it have stopped the violence? Should drugs, in special circumstances, be used to forcibly change minds? I think not, but I always liked the idea of nonlethal weaponry.

I was intrigued by Morgan Brent's story yesterday about the Amazon Indians who gave ayahuasca to the rubber tree plundering white people to get them to respect the forest and to stop killing the indigenous peoples. He said that the Santo Daime religion grew out of this shrewd strategy.

### ***Acid and the Left of the Sixties***

Psychedelics used willfully do tend to show the insanity of war. During the Vietnam War, thousands of Americans, tripping out on acid, grass, mushrooms, or mescaline, got a heightened sense of the utter absurdity of killing Vietnamese in their own country. Some activists declared that LSD was a guerilla weapon of pacifist resistance, and one that ultimately helped to end that war.

Ironically, the drug the CIA originally saw as a means of control was used by millions of young people to help deprogram themselves from a civilization of inhumane priorities. The Rand Corporation speculated that LSD might be an *antidote* to antiwar political activism, but that scenario backfired completely. Those who didn't want to fight in Vietnam turned against the U.S. government.

Actually, there are differing views about the true nature of acid's influence on the politics of the Sixties. For strict Marxists, drugs were considered opiates, diversionary, delusional, and selfish. At the Dialectics of Liberation conference in 1967, some leftist organizers said that acid would undermine political commitment — just as the Rand Corporation had hoped.

Many believe that politics and psychedelics are a total contradiction in terms. Kesey, Tim Leary, and Allen Ginsberg originally took the stance that the psychedelic revolution was decidedly NOT political, though Ginsberg's first inspiration after taking psilocybin with Leary was to take off his clothes and celebrate the brotherly love that emanated from the drug, a force he felt could end the Cold War if he could get Khrushchev and Kennedy to take the stuff together.

## **Leary declared it a "sacred act to shoot a robot policeman."**

But Leary felt that politics were debased and should be discussed only when one was on all fours. A few years later, though, when a militant faction of

the Students for a Democratic Society liberated him from jail and smuggled him to Algeria, he embraced the politics of the New Left, going so far as to declare it a "sacred act to shoot a robot policeman."

The founders of the Youth International Party, the Yippies, including Abbie Hoffman, Jerry Rubin, and Paul Krassner believed that acid's anything-can-happen sensibility was at the heart of the party's creed. The 1967 march on the Pentagon and its attempted levitation was a psychedelically-inspired work of magic theater. Acid broadened horizons and opened up the mind to new, radical solutions, some of which happened to be violent. There were dozens of bombings in the U.S. at the tail end of the Sixties, raising the question of acid's role in inflaming the zealots and hotheads.

After the era was over, John Sinclair of the White Panther Party conceded that acid had created a lot of unrealistic expectations. But when I talked to him the other day, he said that he now thinks it would be *good* if people got a little nutty and unrealistic via the right drugs, because the complacency about the current reality is so dangerous.

To get the rare woman's perspective, Kate Coleman, one of the original Yippies, told me recently that she thinks it's bats to think that it was acid that made you anti-war, since the people who were taking it were anti-war already and did so as just another anti-establishment rite. Acid only exaggerates your prevailing worldview, she says. Fascists who trip get fascistic thoughts, and peaceniks that trip get peaceful thoughts. I don't agree with her, but her memories of what she calls the "ecstatic infantilism" of the acid-fueled Sixties are as valid as anybody's in trying to document the time. She also raises some good questions about the true provenance of the counterculture's political convictions. Can a psychedelic experience actually cause a person to develop a completely new political philosophy, or does it only accentuate sympathies that are already there?

Bob Dylan is an interesting case study of a semi-political public figure who felt that psychedelics helped him transcend politics altogether. Soon after he first took acid in 1964 he abandoned the Old Left who marched to his civil rights and ban-the-bomb anthems. He then proceeded to spurn the antiwar New Left in spite of their desperate pleas to lend his prestige to the cause. In interviews back then he spoke comically and surrealistically about how he couldn't support movements for even worthy causes, because they were too parochial, sacrificing the greater cosmos for a few pebbles of self-righteous dirt. When your focus is on a hunk of butter, he'd say, you overlook the butter itself. He thought that any attempt to organize was futile and conceited. His message was "Don't follow leaders."

Dylan is a fabulous example of politics transcended through a systematic shattering of reality through psychedelics, but ultimately, I still think it's impossible to avoid getting your hands dirty with politics, and if psychedelics can help enlighten your political outlook, all the better.

### ***MDMA as the LSD of Today***

The counterculture of today that takes inspiration from psychedelics, most visibly the rave culture, is somewhat less confrontational than its Sixties counterpart. The set and setting are different, and the drugs are as well. LSD is decidedly more violent in dissolving boundaries than MDMA is, and the Vietnam War was horrifically unsettling. Together they made for an extremely tumultuous era, but perhaps that explosiveness led to the premature burning out of that counterculture. Today's psychedelic society, the rave culture, is still going strong into its third decade. Using MDMA as a bonding agent, this movement has a vast international scope, and a highly pacifist and celebratory nature.

I wonder if Ecstasy could become the social glue for a new activism, if an urgent cause was identified for it. It seems to me that there is a huge potential for this, but just how political do ravers want to become, and just what would qualify as an international cause worth organizing for?

While the rave culture has produced a viable alternative value system based on democratic communalism, and the movement does attract political progressives, there are plenty of even sympathetic observers who have noted that beyond transcendental group celebration, the politics of rave don't necessarily extend beyond its own boundaries or lend itself to any significant political issues beyond the war on drugs.

As one essayist put it in George McKay's *DiY Culture*: "A certain amount of sado-masochistic self-denial, losing one's ego to relentless machine rhythms..., disappearing with revolutionary ideas and all down the trance whirlpool into an empty sink of oblivion, does not seem to create a strong political counter-force."

Since the Sixties, British youth culture, with its festival travelers, anarcho-punks, squatters, Do It Yourself, and rave movements, has provided alternative modes of expression that have resonated with the young throughout the Euro-American world. McKay's books document these "cultures of resistance," but the subtitle of *DiY Culture*, "Party & Protest," begs the question, does a youth culture, however avid its adherents, translate into a political force? If ravers were to form a political party, what would it be called: The Party Party? Or is there another stage of political activism that could evolve?

In his book *Generation Ecstasy*, Simon Reynolds says that the social and cultural impact of Ecstasy in Britain

## **If ravers were to form a political party, what would it be called: The Party Party?**

was so revolutionary because of what you could call its rigid decorum and class structure. What better environment than the affluence, modernity,

and diversity of late 20<sup>th</sup> century Britain for melting down barriers between class, race, gender, and sexual orientation? Ecstasy has had a decidedly positive influence on British society, easing tensions between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland, and reducing football hooliganism and male predatory behavior in the clubs.

Protection of old social barriers is one of the motives behind recent anti-rave laws in Britain, which identify "repetitive beats" as a social ill, echoing the fear of the "rhythmically obedient type" identified in the 1930s by the German cultural theorist Theodor Adorno. Realistically, though, what would the collective egoless mob at a rave march for after the party was over? What is it that the establishment has to fear?

Although it has barely been explored, raves, just like rock music telethons, can be used to dramatize political issues. In Israel, the Green Leaf Party held a rave this May to publicize its political and social agenda. A Rave against Occupation, in front of the Tel Aviv Museum, featured Arab rappers. According to Boaz Wachtel, Chairman of the Green Leaf Party, the dance scene in Israel is heterogeneous and vibrant with youth, bringing new life to the peace movement. By contrast, he says that the Peace Now organization has become a yuppie movement for the relatively rich Ashkenazim.

### ***Politics of the Drug War***

One of the most compelling cases for politicizing psychedelics is the fact that they are illegal and that many are being punished by the government for using them. We're all involved or affected by politics, whether we like it or not. As long as the state bans the drugs you want to use, you are already politicized by your use of those drugs, and your use of them is a political act. Anyone who comes out of the closet to say that psychedelics have been useful to his or her life is taking a political stance.

To address drug laws head on there are a few political parties around the world that have organized under the banner of their criminalized drug of choice, cannabis. Israel's Green Leaf Party needs just 16,000 more votes in order to be represented in the Knesset. The party platform is very progressive, advocating the decriminalization of drugs and prostitution, human rights for all citizens and an immediate end to the Occupation.

Similarly, the Marijuana Party in Canada, headed by my editor at *Heads* magazine, Boris St. Maurice, promotes a sensible and responsible anti-prohibition agenda, though one that keeps its focus on cannabis law reform. The situation in Canada is less divisive and desperate than it is in Israel, so it's understandable that the Marijuana Party

wants to keep a limited and comparatively conservative agenda.

So psychedelics can be the rallying point for a new counterculture, but this would be, in effect, an exclusive community set apart from the whole, limited to those who are agitated about the issue of drugs. The sort of community the world seems to need now must transcend this kind of special-interest advocacy. But the drug issue is a thorn in the side of society, spilling over into the most serious of military and political affairs. No matter where you stand on the issue, it's hard to get around the politics of drugs.

The ironies of the drug war are everywhere today. Nabbing dope dealers is a higher priority in the U.S. than stopping terrorists, though the government would have you believe that dopers and terrorists are working together. If the 9/11 hijackers had been suspected of selling dope, they would have been more closely monitored. The war on drugs has affected our value system, our ethics, and our intelligence-gathering ability. Columnist Arianna Huffington dared to blame the government for being, in effect, incapacitated — though not stoned — by drugs, devoting a disproportionate share of resources to fighting an unwinnable war on citizens' personal choice to take drugs, instead of working to prevent terrorism. Boaz Wachtel tells me that the movement to change the drug laws in Israel is growing steadily, attracting up to 20% of the population, because over there it looks increasingly silly to chase pot smokers when you could be trying to prevent a massacre.

On Super Bowl Sunday, in between commercials for drugs like Viagra and Prozac, the U.S. government ran ads saying that if you use illegal drugs, you're supporting the terrorists. We're being told that the war on drugs and now the war on terrorism will be fought into the indefinite future — just like the interminable wars that Big Brother subjected its citizens to in George Orwell's *1984*. What's even more disturbing is that they're saying that the war on terrorism needs to be fought *in the same manner* as the war on drugs, which to any rational observer would seem to be highly unsuccessful and unjust military operations involving violations of civil rights and democratic principles — with no reduction in consumption. Opposition to the war on drugs is growing, but you don't have to be stoned to see the wisdom in this perspective, so this is not a "psychedelic" movement per se.

Although I oppose the government's war on drugs, I'm not against government involvement in the regulation of drugs. One of the sentiments associated with the use of psychedelics is a libertarian ethos that says, "Leave me alone, keep the government out of my life." But personal drug use needs intelligent administration and regulation and the collective will of the society, as expressed through a democratic government, could bring that about, just as it

## **Set aside one day to invite fifty million people around the world to take a good healthy dose of MDMA, psilocybin, or some other sacred substance, at the same time.**

does for regulation of traffic on our highways.

It will take political action to bring about drug law reform, and it will take political action to regulate the intelligent use of psychedelics and other

drugs. Psychedelic sessions could then be structured and guided by the collective wisdom of centuries of shamanic ritual and lessons learned from modern clinical research and from more informal practices. Select, certifiably pure psychedelics could then be placed once again in the service of private therapy for individuals, couples counseling, and the treatment of depression, PTSD, drug or alcohol dependency, and other mental illnesses. And they could also be shared in settings for congregational worship, as the Native American Church uses peyote and the Santo Daime and Uniao de Vegetal churches in Brazil use ayahuasca. The U.S. courts are moving closer to legalizing ayahuasca for sacred use, in limited cases, just as it has for peyote. Such measures on behalf of religious freedom may be the best hope for the legal sanctioning of psychedelics.

### ***Tripping Day***

One way to demonstrate for a more humane society, and show the true nature of psychedelics, might be to hold a worldwide Tripping Day. Set aside one day to invite fifty million people around the world to take a good healthy dose of MDMA, psilocybin, or some other sacred substance, at the same time. Participants would open up their hearts and minds to each other and to the universe. The event could be structured like a group meditation, involving communal song, dance, and invocations of prayer. My sense is that the result would be a fantastic awakening of the emergent global consciousness network, which would strike a harmonious chord from Chicago to Bangkok, Sydney to Sao Paulo, London to Delhi, Durban to Tehran.

Having the whole world trip together, virtually anyway, would be like everybody tuning into the same radio frequency with a sense of global purpose, like listening to one of FDR's fireside chats or Winston Churchill's radio broadcasts, though without the nationalism or the "small mouth noises" as Terence McKenna called them. A more recent example of this sort of worldwide connection, and one that was psychedelically inspired, was the live global television broadcast of the Beatles' "All You Need is Love." You'll note that the message was not "Join the Labour Party" but something decidedly transcendent of politics.

Having the world trip together would open up a void, a space to fill with the communal soul of compassion. Such an event would demonstrate the value of empathy, self-reflection, and the interconnection of all life to the world at large.

What immediate effect this would have on our disposition toward the troubles in the world would most certainly NOT

## **Psychedelics, should they ever be overtly used to guide political action, could develop an elitist bubble that is out of touch with life on the street.**

be to increase our military budgets. Rather it would quicken the pulse in the bond of human kinship we've begun to feel more acutely in the wake of 9/11, fostering a surge in diplomacy and intercultural

outreach. Such a communal connection, kicked home by a deep intoxication with the Breath of All, nonsectarian Life, would strengthen the resolve to oppose terror in *all* of its guises, not just those our respective governments don't like. The weapon that psychedelic consciousness brings to all wars is a perceptual laser that dissolves blind rage and dispels the rumor of our disparateness.

As for the date to do this, let's say that on December 21, 2012, to celebrate Terence's memory, among other things, as many people as possible should take the day off and ingest their psychedelic of choice.

### ***Arguments Against Psychedelic Politics***

Tripping Day might be a bit idealistic. To sober up a bit, we'd have to concede that there are always good arguments for drawing a line between psychedelic consciousness and political activism.

There *is* a kind of evangelism that comes after you trip, which was particularly rampant in the Sixties. But how do we reconcile the fact that we can only change ourselves, if that? As a hippie publication called the *Oracle* wrote in 1967: "How can we have a groovy, happy society until everyone has reached his own nirvana?" Just as Leary, Kesey and others felt at the beginning of the LSD revolution, it's sound reasoning to say that before anybody sets out to change the world, he'd better make damn sure he puts his own house in order. So I'm very sympathetic to the sentiment that psychedelics are much more about inner development than about public activism.

In the Sixties, acid was just one volatile factor among many. Back then the Vietnam War was killing loads of our own boys in addition to two million Vietnamese. Most observers would agree that the war had much more of an effect on politics than LSD did. Even though there are terrible wars and crimes being committed across the world today, the consciousness of atrocity that the Vietnam War gave to the youth of the North is not really a part of today's landscape. Perhaps the sort of activism that MDMA might help ignite with its social cohesion will not develop until such a galvanizing event or condition comes into play.

There are many other questions that arise when the nutty idea of applying psychedelic values to politics comes up. What role would psychedelics play if you're on the receiving end of violence, oppression, and atrocity? Would you still maintain the same value for human life when your own people are being regularly attacked by an external foe? Even some leftist psychedelic veterans in the U.S. had trouble keeping their pacifism alive since bin Laden hit us.

The message that comes out of a psychedelic experience depends on culture, circumstance, and other issues of set and setting.

For spoiled young people in a decadent society that was making war on the

Third World, LSD helped turn us against the Vietnam War. But people of another time and place, in more dire circumstances, might have another take on the place for compassion and pacifism. Boaz Wachtel says it wouldn't be easy to find representatives from the Palestinian side to drop MDMA with Israelis.

In our idealism, we Northerners are trying to unite with the archaic verities of the aboriginal psychedelic ethos, but in every society, material conditions will determine the shape of the psychedelic experience and also the politics. I think there's a danger that psychedelics, should they ever be overtly used to guide political action, could develop an elitist bubble that is out of touch with life on the street.

### ***Politics Are Unavoidable***

Even though the major political parties have made a sham of politics, selling their votes to special interests and global corporations, politics are something we must all concern ourselves with in one way or another. Politics are something we all must practice to manage our lives, to shepherd the environment, to set up public education, roads and bridges, and the infrastructure of health care. In the debate over psychedelics and politics, I think that both the cynics and the evangelists are wrong. Neither should we eschew politics as some alien, contaminated game, nor should we be swept away in a zealous fervor unleashed by the sense of imminent possibility, which acid imparted in the Sixties.

Although psychedelic drugs do not provide content *per se*, they do seem to provide access to a reservoir of values and perspectives that can nourish one's sense of fraternity and civic duty. Ginsberg took acid on the day of LBJ's gall bladder surgery and prayed for the president to heal, in the belief that spreading good will to one and all was the path to peace.

Religious conviction can, for good or ill, mutate into political activism. Witness the rise of the Christian Right in the U.S. during the Reagan era. It's interesting to see that the fastest growing religion in America is Buddhism, and much of that has been fueled by psychedelics. A book called *Zig Zag Zen* with artwork selected by Alex Grey examines this phenomenon. I wonder about the prospects of a political impact to Buddhism, though. While the growth of such spirituality would promote compassion and pacifism, the Buddhist principle of detachment loans itself directly to noninvolvement in politics.

You have to remember that even if you don't vote, that decision itself is effectively registered as a vote, so

you might as well let your values exercise themselves and be reflected in some way. Those directions in which psychedelic consciousness led us – pacifism, communalism, environmentalism, respect for the web of life – are all worthy of acting on.

Until prohibition is lifted, all who use psychedelics will be politicized on one level. To take a public stand in favor of reform, I support the challenge issued by former Grateful Dead lyricist John Perry Barlow, who happens, by the way, to be a Republican, the party of Bush. He says that everybody who has taken a psychedelic, and especially all those who are influential in business and politics, should "out" themselves as users of psychedelics. This would strike a blow at the legal and social stigmatization of psychedelics.

But psychedelics cannot practically be the banner or the *raison d'être* for a significant political movement whose agenda aims to achieve much beyond drug law reform. Although they can continue to nourish our compassion for the other and our care for the web of life, psychedelics, because they will always be a matter of controversy, must remain in the background of politics. Since they are obviously NOT the sole source of wisdom or a truly direct source of political good sense, they should not be politicized or proselytized as such.

It's not the flag of MDMA we must wave, but the flag of generic ecstasy and intelligent, human rights-oriented policies. If psychedelics help us realize this, all the better, but they must also keep their place in the larger context.

## Notes From Overground

### A Psychonaut Among the Politicians

by Mike Jay

Brixton, South London, 2002. A six-month pilot experiment in policing, during which the use and possession of cannabis were ignored by law enforcement officers, has come to an end, and left a subtly but significantly altered state of affairs in its wake. Now, several shops in the district – mostly Jamaican grocery stores – are discreetly selling weed from their back rooms. There's a steady trickle of customers, many of them clearly on their way home from work: suits and ties, clutching bottles of wine and rental videos. Dotted around the area are chill-out cafes where customers of a similar profile stop for a smoke on the way home, or before hitting the parties. Quietly, too, ethical dealer outfits are easing into business, offering fair trade and quality-controlled product independent of the gangsta networks.

Scoring and smoking in this modest but brave new world is, for many, a surprisingly emotional experience. The cosmic grin spreads irresistibly, peaking in a kind of mad glee normally only experienced on the first visit to Amsterdam's coffee-shops. Drug users have carried the burden of subterfuge and exclusion for so long that we have all but forgotten that we do so: to have it suddenly lifted is an intoxication in itself. Parallel experiences leap vividly and unbidden to mind – festivals and foreign travel, mostly – but here, suddenly, they're patched into the mundane traffic of urban life. This is no longer a holiday: it's home.

But here's the question: is this new-found liberation really as important as it can easily feel under the influence of good weed, Moroccan trance and like-minded company? It's easy to argue that it's not. The outcome of the Lambeth Experiment, as the Brixton police project was known, was readily predictable in advance. Its benefits were mostly limited to the obvious: a saving in police time and paperwork. Overall crime, apart from the small but vigorously contested distortion of a trickle of drug tourism, went neither up nor down. Street dealing of cannabis was already well established; the real problems, the crack and the guns, were entirely unaffected. Subjectively the



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experience may have been a revelation to many, but in the objective world of public policy it was little more or less than business as usual.

The new dispensation is brittle, too. Shops and cafes and dealer networks are tolerated only as long as they remain beneath the public radar. Newspaper articles about them, enthusiastic or outraged, trigger temporary crackdowns on the most visible (otherwise I'd have given you more useful directions in the first paragraph). The first person to set up an above-board coffee-shop dealership, outside Manchester, was recently hit with a three-year jail sentence. The practice works locally, but the wider world is not yet ready to accept the full implications of the logic behind it.

And when we flip from microcosm to macrocosm, it's obvious that the impact on the big picture is zero. Cannabis hasn't been legalised: users may no longer be busted, but it's still traded by criminals who pay no tax and often enforce their trade with lethal violence. And cannabis is the least of it. The illicit drug business now represents, according to the U.N., 8% of all international trade – up there with oil and arms as the biggest money machine on the planet. Huge chunks of the world are carved up by drug lords and drug-funded civil wars; huge chunks, too, corralled into debt servitude and political obedience to the West under the cost of the war on drugs, which itself guarantees that producing drugs is the only way in which millions, from Bogotá to Burma to the Bronx, will ever make any serious money. Within the big picture, it's almost obscene to suggest that the question of whether Western city kids are arrested or fined or ignored for their cannabis use might be important.

But the sense that the Lambeth Experiment represents some kind of tipping-point is perhaps not entirely delusional. It certainly represents the outcome of a debate about drugs which has dramatically altered British mainstream opinion over the last few years. Minor as the tinkering with the law has been, it couldn't have happened unless the government had been persuaded that they are, for the first time, trying to run a country where the majority of people perceive the use of cannabis as both widespread and low in risk; a country where their familiar tough-on-drugs rhetoric is now more likely to prompt ridicule than applause from public and media alike, and where those who regard punitive drug laws as a state's moral imperative are paid increasingly less



attention than those who are searching for practical solutions to practical problems. Change has to begin somewhere, and drug politics is a juggernaut not easily turned around. A few relaxed stoners in South London may be no big story in itself, but it may be an eloquent symbol for something much bigger.

The war on drugs has long been a defining feature of modern politics,

and its effects ripple out far beyond the world of drugs themselves. By the same token, it's an issue which, if turned around, would have far greater leverage to change society as a whole than most people realise. If the drug trade could be controlled and regulated – which is to say legalised – the effects would reach way beyond mere convenience for the end user. Global power relations could be dramatically remodelled, with a legitimate and highly lucrative trade flowing from South to North against the prevailing current of multinationals and trade barriers. The oppressive foreign policies of the West would lose one of their main tools for assuring the compliance of nations straitjacketed in poverty and chaos. The curtailment of personal freedoms which has evolved in large part because huge swathes of the population are constantly engaged in furtive criminal acts – the consensual transaction of buying and selling drugs – could be rolled back. The freedom to use drugs legally would also need to stress the medical and legal principle of the user's own risk, and thus introduce a new sense of personal agency far more powerful than the one currently emasculated by consumer litigation and FDA bureaucracy. Those opposed to the legalisation of drugs often argue that it would aid and abet the breakdown of society as we know it. I think they're right; I certainly hope they are. Above and beyond drugs themselves, the way the world would have to evolve to deal with them is a pretty good blueprint for reconceiving the relation between the individual, the state and the international community for the coming century.

I've become increasingly involved in the public drug policy debate over the last few years. I'm not a politician or a bureaucrat, and never have been. I'm a writer, among whose long-term interests is trying to make sense of the drug experience – historically, culturally, scientifically, personally. It was this which first led me to being approached by those engaged in lobbying, researching and campaigning for an end to the prohibition of drugs, since when I've tried to contribute to furthering the argument wherever possible.

What follows are some impressions of how the activities in which we engage look to the outside world of politics: notes from overground, as it were.

It's been a memorable ride. I've met with Members of Parliament who understand as well as any of us that the drug laws are a hangover from the bad old days of racial imperialism, and their survival a shameful testament to the vanity, waste, hypocrisy and brute stupidity of the political system. I've met Foreign Office officials who deny that there's any such thing as traditional coca use in the Andes, or indeed any good reason not to spray the entire subcontinent with genetically engineered coca-rotting fungus. I've sneaked spliffs with Dutch diplomats and professors in the car parks of grand conference halls, and participated in broadcast debates where eminent public figures have courageously come out as drug users. Most of all, I've spent long hours – though nowhere near as long as some – helping to put campaigns, strategies and research projects together on a shoestring or less, while the juggernaut of prohibition steamrollers over us every month with millions of dollars' worth of anti-drug propaganda – which, when you penetrate to the corridors of power, it seems that very few people actually believe.

Money is the most concrete motif of the lack of symmetry between the two sides of the drug debate. The war on drugs, as we know, costs a fortune – as taxpayers, we fund it. But funding for opposing views is, even by the standards of non-government lobbying, at starvation level. There's no corporate funding to be had: the perception of parallel commercial interests like alcohol and pharmaceuticals is essentially that illicit drugs, if legal, would eat into their market share. The status quo suits them just fine. The freedom to take drugs is also a difficult cause to pitch to charities, competing as it must against a multitude of worthy and uncontroversial causes from landmines to disabled children to the environment. Most celebrities are entirely comfortable asking for money to research cystic fibrosis, less so defending the rights of drug takers. Research funding is plentiful, but almost exclusively earmarked for projects aiming to demonstrate the negative health effects of illicit drugs. The viable options boil down to little more than donations from a small number of wealthy, usually anonymous hipsters and libertarians (you know who you are, and you're much appreciated) or the morally problematic strategy of dealing in the illicit drug market which you're campaigning to eliminate.

Beyond money, there's also a striking lack of symmetry between the two arguments. Theirs is short, easy to understand, and wrong; ours is coherent, supported by more evidence but a great deal more complicated. "Drugs cause crime" has brevity and the superficial ring of common sense. "Problematic drug use and crime are linked, but the relationship is not necessarily causal – both are products of the same underlying social conditions, and the majority of crime is caused by the prohibition of drugs rather than the drugs themselves" is much more accurate

but much too long for a media sound bite. Nevertheless, it's a more robust argument, and once assimilated has much more staying power. Many people, politicians and public, once fully exposed to all the dimensions of the case for legalisation – economic, political, health, crime, the historical background, the difference between normative and problematic drug use – find that their old certainties about the necessity of prohibiting drugs are gone for good. Once through the looking glass, everything looks different – and makes a great deal more sense.

These structural asymmetries give the whole process something of the dynamics of a guerrilla war: they've got the guns and the money, we've got the arguments and the numbers. And for all the adversities, I'm profoundly glad I'm not on the other side. Every so often you get a flash of what it must be like to be throwing endless money and resources into an unwinnable war, with your credibility and authority ebbing as the world outside puts more pieces of the story together. You catch people who've dedicated their lives to fighting what they believed to be a social evil – customs officers, addiction psychiatrists, crop substitution planners – glimpsing the possibility that their lifetime commitment to fighting drugs may have been part of the problem all along. And that's a feeling that the entire federal drugs budget can't make better.

In the same way, the process shakes our own preconceptions about who the bad guys actually are, and what makes them tick. They're certainly not who I thought they were before I started. The cops, for example – in Britain at least – are not the bad guys. For every drug user they've always been the most visible symbol of unjust authority, but certainly over here they've also been one of the most dynamic and effective forces for change. They know as well as we do that the majority of drug users don't commit any crimes apart from taking drugs and selling them to each other. As their resources are stretched, the pressure on them to achieve results is ramped up and cooperation from all sectors of society becomes ever more crucial to their work, enforcing the drug laws has become for many both a waste of time and an embarrassment. It's hard to shake the residual feeling that, for the cops, we're the criminals, and eliminating us is their business. But, as several (mostly retired) officers have taken the trouble to explain to me, our self-image as outsiders is damaging not just to our cause but to theirs. Seeing an injustice in society and campaigning to correct it isn't being a criminal, it's being a responsible citizen. What really bugs them isn't us – it's the real bad guys, the wealthiest people in the world running untouchable drug empires.

So if the cops aren't the bad guys, who are? As often in real life, they're harder to identify up close than from a distance. Many of the hardened anti-drug warriors turn out to be behaving honourably, once you understand that the word "drugs" means something quite different to them than it does to us. Certainly, its meaning bears no relation to the reality of what drugs are. We can perhaps best

approximate their sense of it by trying to recall our early childhoods, when "drugs" conjured a distant bogeyman, trailing associations of addiction, misery and evil. And if this is really what drugs were, then we would probably oppose them as strongly as everyone else. But, of course, they're not – as ever, knowledge is our weapon, and ignorance theirs. The prohibition of drugs is an easy sell to a terrified and misinformed public, far less easy to a public who know the score.

Which brings us to the greatest asymmetry in the whole debate: between how much they know about drugs, and how much we do. Drug policy is conducted at many levels by people whose knowledge of their subject is breathtakingly limited (interspersed with some who know plenty, and often more than they can say). Cannabis, Ecstasy and heroin are just words to most of the people who decide their legal fate – and words with a set of associations which we would barely recognise. This brings a surreal quality to proceedings: "experimenting" with cannabis or psychedelics is discussed in terms which we would be more likely to apply to base-jumping off ten-storey buildings, joining the Scientologists or deliberately eating peanuts if you have a fatal allergy. Sometimes, too, the opposite effect applies: once drug-naïve experts have been convinced of the Big Lie, it can be hard to explain to them that widespread crack, meth or heroin use is still not necessarily without its problems. Wandering into the arcane and unfamiliar worlds of government policy and bureaucracy, it's hard to shake the sense that we're subversives participating under false pretences. But in many ways we're the experts – and in a systemically skewed world where those who make the decisions are drawn from the dwindling sector of the population who know not whereof they speak, our input is crucial to any sensible solution.

Nevertheless, our crucial expertise still officially disqualifies us. There's no quicker way to make sure that your input is ignored or discredited than to be blithely confessional about your own drug use. But, if played tactfully, our position has one quality which is much sought after: public credibility. In a world where official pronouncements are routinely ignored or ridiculed by the drug-literate public, the support of non-government groups who are untainted by the Big Lie is increasingly sought after. As the debate moves slowly – oh so slowly – from prejudice to evidence, endorsement from the street becomes an increasingly valuable bargaining chip for those in power.

So, as with all guerrilla wars, the endgame of moving towards peace requires that both sides abandon confrontation and seek consensus. We may have every justification for ranting about the monumental injustices of the drug laws, but the effect of so doing is to drive those who write them deeper into their bunkers. The way to coax them out is to show that we understand their problem, and that we can offer some solutions as long as they are prepared to move the debate from moral sermons to objective measures of effectiveness. These have long been sidelined

in the drug debate for the simple reason that they all point in the wrong direction for the policymakers: supply up, demand up, overall use up, drug quality up, health problems up, prices steady or down has been the brutal summary of the last thirty years of billion-dollar crusades. But if we set performance indicators for measuring the effectiveness of policy – acquisitive crime levels, health indicators like HIV or Hep C rates, the effect of targeted prevention programs on levels of use – we can move the debate into territory where the politicians can be demonstrably effective in their jobs. We also, of course, move into territory where it becomes clear that the majority of anti-drug expenditure is completely wasted, criminalising the majority of drug users is expensive and ineffective, and problem users are better served by treatment than law enforcement.

And so, psychonauts and politicians together, into the nitpicking and tedious world of state bureaucracy: budgets, costings, regulations, guidelines, implementation, monitoring, evaluation. It's boring and it's slow but it's not pointless, and I'm glad there are other people able, by temperament or by force of conviction, to do a great deal more of it than I can stomach. But, fortunately, it's not the only game in town. Drug policy solutions aren't merely dictated from on high – they're also what evolves on the street. When the coffee-shops emerged in Amsterdam in the 1970s, nobody decreed that it should be thus: coffee-shops were where the trade had already begun to locate itself, in responsible outlets where alcohol wasn't sold, under-18s were prohibited, and codes of practice had been developed at grass roots. What's starting to emerge in Brixton, illegal as it remains, is nevertheless part of the solution. If we can show that the buying and selling of drugs can take place responsibly, without any associated crime or violence, with the support of the community and the local police, we are not merely doing what comes naturally but furthering drug policy as effectively, or more, as if we were whispering in the Prime Minister's ear. Our drug use is on one level political, whether we wish it to be or not; and though we've absorbed a lifetime of conditioning that the politicians are the responsible adults and we the errant children, we are nevertheless, in many ways, the adults in this debate. It's our responsibility to explain, to demystify, to reassure, to address fears: to give the politicians the confidence to move with us, hand in hand, into a grown-up future. Who knows, it may be our kids rather than us who get to enjoy the benefits – but if we don't lead the way, no one else will.

*Mike Jay's most recent book is Emperors of Dreams: Drugs in the Nineteenth Century, reviewed in Trip #7 (Winter 2002). He is also the author of Blue Tide: The Search for Soma and the editor of Artificial Paradises: A Drugs Reader. He works with various drug policy organisations in the UK, including Transform (<http://www.transform-drugs.org.uk>).*



# Experiential Ecology and the Perpetual Revolution

by Adam Fish

## *I: novelty and communitas*

"Now if we survey the universe ... it bears a great resemblance to an animal or organized body, and seems actually with a like principle of life and motion... The world, therefore, I infer, is an animal."

— David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*

The biosphere is a conscious, self-transcending, novelty-synthesizing Organism. On every level the new and the original mushroom out of homogeneity, conformity, habit, and "law." All thriving systems are spontaneously adaptive and open to change. Jeremy Campbell says in Jeremy Narby's *The Cosmic Serpent* that open systems move "away from the simple, the uniform, and the random, and toward the genuinely new, the endlessly complex products of nature and mind." In other words, we are in a perpetual revolution.

On a cultural level novelty results in paradigm shifts, happenings, revolutions. Certain individuals are driven towards the new, "hip," modern, and original. Within human cultures throughout all time, revolutionaries, artists, and explorers have planted ideas that fertilized sterile intellectual and ideological grounds. In all industrial cultures novel "cells" can transform society through "ontological anarchy." In response the society realigns itself and acquires a fresh view on an old practice. To shamelessly take direct action against abiotic or obscene institutions — forcing society to break old traditions or create new ones — is novelty profoundly asserting itself.

The psychedelic community is "hip" and modern and yet also nostalgic for the past. In the minds of many psyche-nauts, innovation (often linked with technology) is blamed for Earthly crises. Some refute the infantile obsessions of Madison Avenue, eschew the sloganeering of "pop" media, and despise the product of these mechanisms: the opulent urbanite. Yet high technology, the proliferation of psychotechnologies, more efficient

forms of resource extraction, people-packed skyscrapers, noisy and filthy subways, the absurd fetishistic modalities of fashion and product peddling, are all "natural" expressions of an organized intelligence on a planetary level. Our "revolution" might be another name for product "innovation." Sustainable living and liberal ideologies are healthy for the planet and the individual, but they may be a small anchor resisting a techno/intellectual evolution morphing us into the future.

What Terence McKenna called the Archaic Revival is a process of "reawakening the awareness of traditional attitudes toward nature, including plants and our relations to them." The Archaic Revival is the return of the "much ballyhooed Gaia... and the emergence of vegetable mind." In the Archaic Revival the plant is taken as the organizational model for life and society. Doing as the plant does our society acquires these basic traits: the feminization of culture, an inward search for values, connectedness and symbiosis, the detoxification of the natural world, recycling, photovoltaic power, a global atmosphere-based energy economy, and the preservation of biological diversity.

The Archaic Revival is a reoccurring theme in many revolutionary movements including environmentalism, the rave, millenarian, and militia cultures. It is evident in the lifestyles and attitudes of many within the psychedelic community that a return to the pre-industrial existence would be ideal, away from Terence McKenna's three enemies of the people: "monogamy, monotony, and monotheism." These egalitarian liberties may be a yearning for the early tribal days our species experienced during the Upper Paleolithic era, possibly accessed through genetic memory stored in our DNA. Since deep ecological awareness, activism, and post-industrial utopia are commonly shared ideals within the psychedelic community, this essay will explore two archetypes, the shaman and communitas, in the context of modeling these ideals.

In gathering and hunting cultures there was an individual whose responsibility it was to seek and engage the foreign

and the mysterious in the dimension from which novelty arises: the spirit world. She is a shaman, master of chaos and purveyor of novelty. As the guide through the plant, animal, and demonic worlds the shaman ventures into the womb of Nature in search of Gaian knowledge.

Many shamanic states require deep concentration, fasting, and odd austerities that in spirit are not far removed from the tree-sits, lockdowns, street theatrics and hunger strikes of modern-day activists. In *Green Psychology: Transforming Our Relationship To The Earth*, Ralph Metzner suggests that healing the planet is basically a shamanic journey. In his altered states of consciousness the shaman must be ever-present, prepared, inventive, and spontaneous. In this state she is attuned to the call of novelty as it originates deep in the forest vale or in the "primitive" recess of her genetic memory. With this knowledge she provokes the individual and collective psyche with unique and politically radical commandments. Her actions have revolutionary potentials: droughts end, lost items are returned, omens are "read," diets must be changed, the tribe must quickly move the camp, despots are demanded to leave the village... In short, the shaman's life is a constant direct action.

Communitas is a term that refers to the qualities binding revolutionary communities. According to Victor Witter Turner in *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, communitas is characterized by homogeneity, equality, anonymity, absence of property and status, minimization of gender distinctions, disregard for personal appearance, no distinctions of wealth, sacredness, continuous reference to mystical powers, and finally foolishness. A communitas is an "open society," fringe, yet with the potential and desire to expand and recolonize the neglected geographies of culture, environment, and self. In *Counterrevolution and Revolt*, Herbert Marcuse said that revolutionary subcultures are "nuclei, 'cells,' laboratories for testing autonomous, non alienated relationships." The psychedelic community exhibits many signs of communitas, such as our Burning Man theme camps, our cross-pollinating online micro-communities, and the openness of emergent cultural scenes.

It may be advantageous or at worst fun to envision ourselves as acting troupes, vagabond artists, desert hobos,



circles of magi, and urban yoginis on the cusp of modernity in all its plastic and Prozac. To avoid the death of the artifact in a rotten

museum the psychedelic community must invigorate the human imagination and tandemically divorce the past. Karl Marx spoke of the "complete emancipation of all human senses and qualities" as a quality of his Commune. We manifest our most innate Homo sapiens qualities not by returning to a fictitious Nature, but by going into "the unknown, the uncertain, and the insecure" regions of our consciousnesses and feral environments as 20<sup>th</sup> century philosopher John Popper suggests. I implore the psychedelic individual resurrect the Court Jester, the mysterious emancipating stranger of the Old West, the magical grand poobah, the Shamaness, and the carnival basecamp. Within these archetypes we can fuse our communities to the twisting and turning, ever-revolving, myth-weaving language of the Earth.

## II: experiential ecology

"Radical environmentalists appreciate that the turning of national forests into tree farms is merely a part of the overall project that also seeks their own suppression. But they will have to seek the wild everywhere rather than merely in wilderness as a separate preserve."

– John Zerzan

The shaman is the master of identifying, elaborating on, and applying novelty, the fecund imagination of Nature. One tactic to access novelty is an information-exchange with cognizant plants. This communication-process, if adopted by environmental activists, could energize a revolutionary praxis and attenuate (acclimatize) the activist to the breathing, resonate voice of Nature. It is true, she speaks much of her ill-health.

It is tautological to say that throughout human history plants have had pragmatically essential roles as foods and tools. On a less tangible but equally essential level plants are tantamount for the development and evolution of humans' cosmologies, spiritualities and religions. All aboriginal cultures have an abundant ethnopharmacology. American archaeologist Brian Schiffer speaks of drugs as mental technologies, material artifacts and communication

devices. Plants are used to sustain the body, heal "sickness," and as aids for spiritual work.

Humans are not alone in using plants for reasons other than to feed themselves. Chimpanzees

swallow bristly leaves to sweep parasites out of the gut. Llamas graze on coca leaves and goats eat red coffee beans. Professors at Kyoto University report that apes indulge in psychoactive substances. African apes eat the seeds of Kola trees that contain caffeine and theobromine. Gorillas in Equatorial Guinea ingest two hallucinogenic plants and chimpanzees in the Republic of Guinea consume *Alchornea floribunda* and *A. cordifolia*. Iboga, an hallucinogen, is exploited by gorillas.

If apes' and humans' neurotransmitters are analogous as these studies suggest, the accidental and subsequently compulsive ingestion of hallucinogenic plants certainly may have excited awe and wonder in *Salinthus tchadensis*, our earliest ancestor. Entheogens have been respectfully used since at least the dawn of our genus 40,000 years ago. Jane Goddall observed chimps exhibiting the "awe and wonder that underlies most religions." She suggests that religion may have started in "such primeval, uncomprehending surges of emotion as chimpanzee threat displays against thunderstorms and waterfalls." Andrew Weil's classic bestseller *The Natural Mind* suggests that alterations of consciousness are essential to the health of many organisms. Rogue entheobotanist Jonathan Ott suggests that the impetus to explore new plant foods and medicines is a necessary quality of an adaptive species.

The entheogenic state is equivalent to "oceanic" (Freud), transcendental (Emerson), or ecstatic (Lakshi) states often characterized by a sense of "joyful interpenetration" with all forms of Nature (Gary Snyder). In this plant-aided Experiential Ecology the holy informality that transects and connects all forms dissolves individuality. This is Nature at her most rudimentary and expansive level where the individual is consumed by a festival of symbiosis. It is in this state that a dialogue with plants begins.

In pre-industrial society this organic/inherent dialogue with the living Biome was widely practiced. Flora and fauna may be in a mystical state permanently. At the roots of what we know as the "world religions" are maps and techniques that pious individuals could use to learn from the abundant knowledge contained in Nature. Specifically, in Paleolithic, Neolithic and Bronze Age cultures an entheogen was the totem and nexus of their spirituality. Examples include: The Burning Bush, the Tree of Life, the Golden Bough, the Forbidden Fruit, the Blood of Christ or Dionysus, the content of the Holy Grail, the Sacred Lotus, the Mystical Mandrake, the Divine Mushroom (Aztec: "Teonanactl"), the Divine Water Lily, Indian Vedic Soma, Polynesian Kava, Incan Mama Coca, and Huichol Peyote Women.

## **When one takes ayahuasca, one can sometimes hear how the trees cry when they are going to be cut down. They know beforehand, and they cry.**

Modern day chemicals that are experientially analogous include LSD, MDMA ("Ecstasy"), 2C-T-7, and DMT.

Anthropologist Jeremy Narby, amazed by the polycultural masterpiece

which is the aboriginal horticultural garden, containing up to 70 different species patch-worked together in harmonious balance, asked a native friend how he knew how to orchestrate such a garden. His friend replied, "You know, Brother Jeremy, to understand what interests you, you must drink ayahuasca." Throughout the Amazon basin Native people confess that their extensive botanical knowledge comes from ayahuasca induced visions. In *The Cosmic Serpent*, Narby makes the case that ayahuasca enables the shaman to perceive DNA, the "ancient high biotechnology," and with it the mind of Nature.

I have drunk ayahuasca within a traditional setting and I assert that the Earth Goddess does appear. A half-hour after drinking the brew I was shot up by glowing blue vines of a great tree and thrust into a prostrate pose at the base of a massive vegetative monolith. I slowly ascended up the trunk of this moist, violet, viscid obelisk noting the gelatinous and translucent eyelids covering the millions of eyes within eyes, writhing tentacles, squiggling worms nestled behind leather wings. When I fully realized that this organism, containing all known species, was Tloic the Aztec Water God and "She who Sees" amongst the Columbia Plateau people, a warm consoling voice said, "Adam, what did you expect the Earth Goddess to look like?"

The shamans of the Peruvian Amazon refer to themselves as vegetalistas. A famous ayahuasca vegetalisto, Pablo Cesar Ameringo, believes that such visions can activate Earth defense:

"Every tree, every plant, has a spirit. People may say that a plant has no mind. I tell them that a plant is alive and conscious. A plant may not talk, but there is a spirit in it that is conscious, that sees everything, which is the soul of the plant, its essence, what makes it alive. I feel a great sorrow when trees are burned, when the forest is destroyed. I feel sorrow because I know that human beings are doing something very wrong. When one takes ayahuasca, one can sometimes hear how the trees cry when they are going to be cut down. They know beforehand, and they cry."

In the anthology *Psychoactive Sacramentals* Rev. George F. Cairns introduces "liberation theology" in which entheogens help with the "full-bodied work of activism." Techno-feminist Sadie Plant believes that "drugs are a dissident technology" which engender a revolutionary praxis. Part of the agenda of Earth liberators could be the emancipation of entheogens from the torches and crucifixes of the DEA under the (dis)guise of the war on drugs. Environmentalists and drug policy activists are fighting a very old, archetypal battle in attempting to

subvert the unjust control of Nature. Within every species, individual, family, culture, society, generation, literary genre, art form, and political ideology there has existed a battle between those who innovate and those who are traditional. Like Coyote, Mescalito, Bear and Odysseus we fight our battle because we are Animals.

The war on drugs began with the subjugation of "witches," pagans, midwives, and their healing and entheogenic ointments. The fear agricultural, state-level, and institutional-religious leaders had of Nature, such that spawned the Spanish Inquisition, continues to this day, but in addition to staking and burning witches, vast spaces of Western public "commons" are staked by corporations and acres of Brazilian rainforest are aflame, and in addition to "drawing and quartering" land-based religions, barbed wire dices the Earth into shrink-wrapped, market-friendly packages. Both ecodefenders and drug policy reformers are battling against the governo-corporate commodification, control, proliferation, and destruction of Nature and natural ways of being. Drug laws infringe upon our individual cognitive liberties like neon orange police tape strapped over living, multivocal, natural systems. The so-called war on drugs is a war not only on pills, powders and plants: it is a war against Nature's imagination and how she blossoms in the dark recesses of wild ecologies and your mind.

### III: the perpetual revolution

Open, adaptive, and receptive minds are to be thanked for our species' 2.4 million years of theatre. In technology, religion, social life, and art, dogmatization leads to entropy of thought. The cognitively free have, with impulse or council, advanced our culture. The cognitively liberated are better apt to accept hyperbole and flux. Pluralism and its diffusion have provided technology with innovations, religion with ritual, the individual with individuation. The mind trained in the skills of liberation knows to celebrate richness, contradiction and cultural effervescence.

One performs an act of cognitive liberation for the creative rush; the more wild the forest of unrecognizable forms, the more spectres and shadows, the greater the conquistador euphoria. We desire to excite the mute protest of the masses into a hysteric clatter. Revolutionaries need laws; these paradigms of simulated virtue circumscribe the moral landscape. Laws illuminate what is cartographically known, dragons and diamonds dotting the perimeter. Certainly, the cognitive liberator is interested in "breaking" laws when the tree of knowledge is ripe and the surveillance cameras that guard every glistening fruit are on the fritz. As Bataille said, we must incite our minds into "perpetual rebellion against itself." Let's revolt against the fear-based convictions that we hold. I follow Hakim Bey when he pleads

## The so-called war on drugs is a war not only on pills, powders and plants: it is a war against Nature's imagination and how she blossoms in the dark recesses of wild ecologies and your mind.

for us to "stop wasting time and energy petitioning the authorities for permission to do what we're doing and simply get on with it." This will bring about not only "social harmony" but social humor!

Multiple options exist for the formulation of individual

or collective reality. The process of familiarizing yourself with the manifold human possibilities never reaches finality. Our species' ability to exaggerate and innovate will ensure the presence of novelty. By grasping this dictum one is more apt to allow impulses to reach florescence, and encourage oddities to develop. The entheogenic experience, if for no other reason than being a Promethean afternoon, teaches us the importance of novelty.

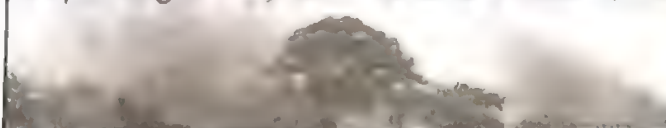
It is our responsibility to personally embody our philos. Galvanized by entheogenic revelry, enticed by preceding troubadours, and as Wrye Sententia wrote in the *Journal of Cognitive Liberty*, "with an enhanced understanding of self and other, one can positively incorporate a libratory epistemology into daily praxis." We should hunt our own consciousness for vestiges of morality to vanquish, rampage our cultures looking for vestibules of undefined laws to define by the harmonic resonance of their shards hitting the pavement. Imagination should not be subject to vassalage.

In all public geographies there are opportunities to be presented and guided by novelty. Aided by psychedelics one gains access to new tactics, comedies, contortions, and theories that when integrated into life transform life into a series of spontaneous synchronicities. Or, as Marcuse put it, we are in a "perpetual revolution... not toward ever more production, not toward Heaven or Paradise, but toward an ever more peaceful, joyful, struggle."

Adam Fish writes and edits for Earth! First, and was the 2001 Alchemind Society Summer Fellow.



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# The Promise of a Psychedelic Future

by James Kent

Our fearless publisher tells it how it is.

In the years that I've been active in the psychedelic community there's one notion I've heard over and over again from various people which has always struck me as slightly odd: that psychedelics can save the world. As a seasoned cynic I tend to view this "psychedelic savior" thinking as dangerous and naive, akin to mindless flag-waving or promises of eternal salvation through the second coming of Christ. It smacks of empty idealized zealotry, a strategy for salvation that pins the hope of the future on some external force that will step in to save us from ourselves just when all hope seems lost. Yet having seen firsthand the transformative power of psychedelics, I can't help but think that they are playing some vital role in the ongoing evolution of our culture. But can they save the world? Let's break down this notion of psychedelic salvation and take a closer look at how entheogens may or may not alter the fate and future of our humble little planet.

The first assumption I take issue with is the notion that the world needs saving, or that it is incapable of being saved without some kind of shamanic intervention. A very good argument can be made that humans are destroying the planet, and that our short-sighted, consumer-driven, power-hungry monkey-lust will ultimately railroad the entire biosphere into early extinction. The threat of runaway self-extinction may be an unavoidable fact of human technological evolution or it may be cyberpunk dystopia blown way out of proportion. In the grand scheme of things the biosphere of the Earth is far more resilient than the human species, capable of surviving just about anything we could throw at it and more. At our maniacal best we could probably only do in ourselves and a good percentage of the fauna that happen to be near the surface of the planet when our species end-game goes down. Barring the explosion of our Sun or some other cosmic catastrophe, the Earth's plant, insect, and microbial life will continue to thrive and march through time long after our heyday. So my point is that the planet does not need saving, it pretty much takes care of itself. If anything it is us that needs saving. You can

say that humans are driving species to extinction, altering global climates and threatening biodiversity, but the same thing can be said about the big meteor impact in the Cretaceous period that presumably killed all the dinosaurs. This event was bad for mega fauna but ultimately good for humans, so was it really a catastrophe or just a global burp followed by a gradual shifting of power structures? There are arguably many species that need saving, and dedicated humans are already working on that problem, but I don't think our species is going anywhere anytime soon. We're demonstrably a tenacious lot, and we will cling bitterly to survival through whatever chaos and mayhem there is to come. We don't need entheogens to remain the die-hard ass-kickers that we naturally are; it's genetic.

The second assumption of psychedelic salvation is that if humans *could* be saved from self-extinction that it would be psychedelics and *only* psychedelics that could lead us towards that salvation. Exactly how people envision psychedelics changing human society and saving the world is always a little murky, but it usually has to do with a lot of groovy people sitting naked in a permaculture fruit orchard eating raw food and having lots of safe, empowering, multi-partnered sex. Sound about right? Of course Terence McKenna popularized the phrase "Archaic Revival" as a way of selling this notion of global intertribal eco-sustainability to a new generation of idealists, and was very hip to the idea that our species survival somehow involved embracing the will of the mushroom, doing away with male-dominator cultural values and ushering in a new age of Gaian values based on plant spirituality. And though the Archaic Revival is a neat concept, it has amounted to little more than a fashion trend among middle-class white kids who are content to adopt a hodge-podge pagan spirituality and mark themselves with neo-tribal signifiers like body piercings, tattoos, dreadlocks, and all the requisite trappings which go along with that uniform, yet still live a modern urban existence steeped in technology and industrialization. Are these urban tribalists the ones who are going to save the

planet? Who knows. Perhaps they'll eventually get their shit together, organize, and stage a coup on December 12, 2012, but I'm not holding my breath.

But maybe those who live hard core by the entheogenic code — eating vegan, living simply, consuming limited resources, eschewing industrial technology for plant technology — are onto something. I suppose if everyone bought into this sensibility, then the biosphere would be a healthier place, but the hippies tried this gambit in the Sixties and most of them eventually sold out and got recycled back into the system as yuppies. Those who didn't sell out dropped out and formed micro-communities based on

tribal values, but their influence is limited to a select few while modern culture steams onward without them. I admit that these neo-tribal visions of a psychedelic society seem more attractive than the lifestyles currently offered up by the working-class status quo, but it is undeniably naive to assume that everything would be better if we just adopted these tried-and-true models of the past, or that psychedelics could even deliver this promised ecotopia from hippie fantasy into hard reality. While small sustainable psychedelic communes may continue to exist for the rest of time, the "sitting naked under a tree living off the bounty of the Earth" trip is sadly in our past, man; we missed the party. That life is now only for those too remote or impoverished to live any other way and for those self-selected few who are too sickened by modernity to live within its confines. The virus of technological progress has taken over human culture for good and it cannot be killed off even if everyone on the planet was force-fed nothing but ayahuasca for a whole month (though a whole year, maybe...).

For better or worse human evolution is now and forever will be intimately entwined with industrialization, technology, mechanization, resource plundering, and the pursuit of cheaper and more efficient ways to make a whole lot of energy to keep the whole shebang running full-speed 24/7. This technological impetus may herald the emergence of a true global neural network, one that is fed as much by its own imminence as by our insatiable thirst for discovery, innovation, and invention. The soul of the technology beast has been flickering ever-forward since the dawn of the industrial revolution, turbine generated electricity jump-starting the unceasing heartbeat, the



wired body growing ever more complex and demanding by the decade. Many people would say this technological evolution is "cool," and that it may one day deliver that monastically pristine technotopia foretold in *Star Trek* and other non-cyberpunk science fiction epics where class barriers are washed away and everyone's needs are magically met through visionary design and universal access to information and free energy. The obvious problem with this model is that it relies on a vast, interconnected, bloated, inefficient infrastructure of industry, commerce, politics, and bureaucracy to drive itself joltingly forward into the unknown future. Increasingly

so, even the simple things we need to enjoy life — like clean running water, food, and medicine — rely on the existence of this vast technological infrastructure which we call modern culture, an infrastructure that includes (and relies on) nasty things like nuclear power, factory farming, logging, mining, fossil fuels, exploited labor, etc. This infrastructure pollutes, enslaves, degrades, and makes garbage by the boatload; it is a self-serving, resource-eating, waste-making machine. This immense global resource burn is all going to the great God of human progress, and it is doubtful that it can be stopped by plant magic or it would have already met some major resistance as plows dug up the Amazon rainforest.

This runaway industrialization is arguably not the healthiest way for us to be running our planet, but I doubt there is enough LSD in the world to halt toxic progress. This problem will go away only through increasingly intelligent design and stricter government regulations that will only be passed in the face of imminent disaster or in hindsight of painful mistakes (because government does nothing proactively). Psychedelics will have little or nothing to do with this process, other than possibly catalyzing activists to write, demonstrate, and speak out about these issues to raise awareness. Psychedelics can invigorate activists, there is little doubt in my mind about that, but what is the net effect of these activists on society as a whole? Many in the mainstream consider these folks to be walking parodies of themselves, the liberal eco-hippies from the suburbs waving signs and protesting whatever is in vogue this week. Others might say that these people are essential voices in a global Green movement that will only grow more

## **Where does the hard-drinking thrasher who drops five hits of acid in the Ozzfest parking lot fit into the great vision of an entheogenic future?**

vibrant and influential over time. Perhaps they are a necessary balancing mechanism keeping the industrialization process from unraveling headlong into certain doom; perhaps they are just wasting their energy. If eco-activists are having a net positive effect on the future of the planet, one has to wonder how many of them have taken up their cause because of psychedelic influence. Would there be such a thing as an eco-activist without the aid of psychedelics, or are psychedelics the major catalyst of the entire environmental movement? I don't have the answer, but my guess is that even without the mushroom whispering in our ears we would still have plenty of activists.

But let's assume that psychedelics do foster a passionate eco-awareness and are responsible for catalyzing ecological activists. How might this fact turn the earth into a kinder, groovier place without all the hunger and disease and polluting and killing and stuff which would otherwise just totally bum us out? There are those in the community who would assert that psychedelics should become an integral part of the human social contract, that everyone should be availed of their mysteries at least once in their lives so they can get "tuned in" to the big picture and fall in line with the grand plan of entheogenic ecotopia once and for all. Sounds good in theory, but no matter how you slice this scenario it still looks a lot like pseudo-religious Fascist brainwashing to me. Would psychedelically brainwashing the global population to be docile, low-consuming, environmentally sensitive custodians of the Earth be a morally just crusade? Is entheogenically enlightened techno-tribal eco-Fascism really the ultimate end-point of human culture? What would happen to people who resisted this movement, and what would we do with all the old-school Capitalist Free-Market Globalization robber-barons and wanton Mega-Consumers infecting the corridors of power right now? Would we be able to seduce them into compliance with flower power, or would we need a violent revolution to wrest control and show these people that we're not fooling around anymore? If so, the psychedelic community better start loading up on ammo now because we have a lot of catching up to do.

I also feel compelled to point out what may be the most fatal flaw of the entheogenic salvation movement, and that is the assumption that psychedelics are non-discriminating in their effect, and that everyone who takes them in "the proper setting" will suddenly become a better, more enlightened and more socially conscious person. While I have met many people who have benefited from psychedelics in a number of ways, I have also met people who have done many psychedelics and are no more enlightened or socially conscious than when they started, possibly even less so. It is well known that psychedelics can cause anxiety and

paranoia, can aggravate latent psychotic tendencies, and can even cause a small percentage of the population to lose it completely (rare though it is). Should emotionally fragile people be forced into the contract

of psychedelic salvation as well? Should we expect them to be miraculously healed through the entheogenic experience and hail any psychotic aftereffects as visionary gifts from the gods? From my general experience I would guess that the number of people who are open-minded and emotionally centered enough to use psychedelics ritually and derive some benefit from the experience is very small, while the number of small-minded emotionally fragile people who might have an aversion or negative reaction to psychedelics is very large. Do we really want to blow these people's minds wide open when there is a distinct possibility that they won't be able to cope? Whoa, bummer dude.

It seems to me that the typical enlightened entheogenic values we praise and would like to see integrated into an entheogenic utopia usually manifest most heavily in middle-class college-educated white people, a privileged demographic with a liberal slant to begin with. One might argue that because these people have been exposed to a larger world view that they are more likely to "understand the wisdom" of an entheogenic trip more than an undereducated person with limited exposure to concepts like Gaia or shamanism would. To many people who have not been properly "indoctrinated" the psychedelic experience can be scary and confusing as hell. Those who do not get an instant kick out of it often swear they will NEVER do it again, and others are instantly drawn to it for reasons that have nothing to do with "psychedelic values." These people can trip heavy through all kinds of strange settings while never actually keying in on anything even remotely like a plant spirit, a Gaian mind, or a benevolent universal enlightenment ushering them towards a better way of life. These are psychedelic users who take drugs for mundane and ignoble reasons; they dig the freaky visuals and cool colors, they like the way psychedelics make music sound, they like to trip and watch weird movies with their friends. These people are more into insanely stretching the boundaries of reality for the sheer thrill of it than anything as presumptuous and grandiose as connecting to the plant mind and saving the world. Where does the hard-drinking thrasher who drops five hits of acid in the Ozzfest parking lot fit into the great vision of an entheogenic future? Is this kind of recreational use even valid within the framework of psychedelic salvation, or must these lumpen users be shown the error of their ways and taught the proper eco-friendly dogma so they can tow the party line with everyone else?

So without resorting to drugging everyone, or taking the revolution to the streets, or pinning the hopes of the future on users simply looking for kicks, where does the

hope of a psychedelic future lie? Perhaps it rests within the hands of a silent few, those true believers who have been touched by the vision yet still manage to work their way into the system undetected: artists, teachers, activists, programmers, doctors, lawyers, journalists, real-estate agents, or people from any profession where liberals can quietly blend in without sounding like jaded intellectuals or hopeless idealists waiting on a pipe dream. These are the people who have gotten "the message" and try to live decent lives in the hopes that the little things they do may one day change things from the inside, or that our silent numbers will gradually reach a critical mass where we can democratically elect a visionary Green party or independent candidate who can sell the world on an entheogenically progressive agenda that totally transforms global society at every level of existence. While I feel for these people and in some way identify with them, I somehow doubt that this glorious day of entheogenic salvation will ever come, or that the rest of the world would permit itself to be transformed if it did. Even with the aid of powerful entheogenic brainwashers it would be tough to strip the world of its history and tradition to the point where everyone suddenly gets along and only wants to do what's best for the world as a whole. Oppressive orthodoxies and traditional blood feuds would still thrive, resources would still be fought over, zealots would still whip the unsatisfied masses into a frenzy, tribes would go to war. Can psychedelics ever save us from

these truisms of human culture? Sadly, I think not.

So what is my vision of the psychedelic future? Well, let me put it this way: You are living in the psychedelic future *right now*. Western culture has been under the influence of heavy psychedelics for at least fifty years now, and the world at large has been under wide psychedelic influence arguably since the dawn of time. Even when psychedelic plants weren't regulated they were primarily consumed by a select few and shared with the general public only in carefully controlled ritual settings. While this type of psychedelic influence doesn't match the glorious "everybody high, everybody free" model predicted by Timothy Leary and his converts, it does set a solid precedent for just *how much* influence we can realistically expect psychedelics to have on culture at large. Can psychedelics reform failing economies or bring about peaceful resolutions to centuries old conflicts? Doubtful. Can psychedelics influence the spiritual beliefs of large segments of the population? Probably. Can psychedelics have a synergistic effect on people who are already artistic and creative, leading to more elegant and intelligent design that emerges from the fringes? Sure, that's already happening and will continue to happen as long as these substances are available. But what's unrealistic is the urge to turn everyone on. Psychedelics aren't for everyone and they can't save everyone. They are simply tools to do with what you wish; how you use them is up to you.



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# The Imaginal Realms

## Psychedelics and Literature

by Marcus Boon

Excerpted from *The Road of Excess: A History of Writers on Drugs* by Marcus Boon, published in December 2002 by Harvard University Press. Copyright © 2002 by Marcus Boon. Used by Permission. All rights reserved.

*In this chapter, I've tried to develop a way of talking about the spaces opened up by psychedelics that avoids traditional distinctions between fantasy or "hallucination" and reality. The term "imaginal" which I use to describe these spaces is not mine – other psychedelic pundits including Peter Lamborn Wilson and Erik Davis have used it. For me, imaginal spaces are a necessary, fundamental aspect of human consciousness, however they are produced. As such they cannot be eradicated, only pushed into corners where they assume new and strange forms. I've applied this term to the history of literature as well as psychedelics, to show that even during the long period where Westerners had no obvious contact with psychedelics, there was still a need to produce and refer to the imaginal spaces with which they are associated, if only through the symbolic form of literature. The Renaissance, arguably the period of Western literature in which the richest imaginal spaces were developed, was also the period where the taboo against use of psychedelics was strongest, while at the same time, knowledge of magical plants, both in the New World, and in the Classical World, was so tantalizingly close at hand. In the excerpt below, I discuss the way that literature mutated from the Renaissance until the second half of the nineteenth century (when the first psychedelic flora were "discovered" by the West), so as to find ways to describe and thus sustain a link to these taboo spaces of consciousness. It's important to note that interest in accessing these spaces through fantasy literature did not end when substances like LSD and mushrooms became widely available in the 1960s. Heads' interest in science fiction, The Lord of the Rings, animated film and comix is well known. What we are seeing is an ever more complex intermingling of methods of accessing and exploring imaginal realms, one that, at least in the West, we are only at the very beginning of. — MB*

The great epic poems of the Renaissance, such as Torquato Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered* (1586) or Spenser's *Faerie Queene* (1596), are full of Eden-like gardens hung with exotic, sensuous fruits, and mysterious plants, gardens that embody the principle of the earthly paradise; a blending of Eden and Greek mythical locations such as the Hesperides. But these gardens also reflect the discovery of the New World by Europeans - and the extreme ambivalence of Europeans in their confrontation with a formerly Paradisal imaginary space suddenly become extremely real. Spenser's *Faerie Queene* in particular, written roughly a century after Columbus first landed in the New World, gives a reasonably accurate account of what a group of ardent European Christian men would do, were they ever to encounter the real life equivalent of one of the Renaissance poets' earthly paradises.

But all those pleasant bowres and Pallace brave,  
Guyon broke downe, with rigour pittillesse;  
Ne ought their goodly workmanship might save  
Them from the tempest of his wrathfulnesse,  
But that their blisse he turned to balefulnesse:  
Their groves he feld, their gardins did deface,  
Their arbors spoyle, their Cabinets suppressse,  
Their banket houses burne, their buildings race,  
And of the fairest late, now made the fowlest place.<sup>1</sup>



Peyote, ololiuhqui (morning glory seeds), mushroom and datura use in Meso-American cultures was noted by Spanish Franciscan monk Bernardino de Sahagun in 1560. Sahagun wrote of peyote (the cactus from which mescaline is derived): "On him who eats it or drinks it, it takes effect like mushrooms. Also he sees many things which frighten one, or make one laugh. It affects him perhaps one day, perhaps two days, but likewise it abates. However it harms one, troubles one, makes one besotted, takes effect on one."<sup>2</sup> He noted that the Chichimeca assembled in the desert to dance and sing when they took peyote and "they wept; they wept exceedingly. They said [thus] eyes were washed; thus they cleansed their eyes."<sup>3</sup> This openness to the richness of the plant world did not last long, however. In 1620, a decree from the Inquisition was issued in Mexico City:

The use of the Herb or Root called Peyote ... is a superstitious action and reproved as opposed to the purity and sincerity of our Holy Catholic Faith, being so that this said herb, nor any other cannot possess the virtue and natural efficacy attributed to it for said effects, nor to cause the images, phantasms and representations on which are founded said divination, and that in these one sees notoriously the suggestion and assistance of the devil, author of this abuse.<sup>4</sup>

Peyote's "natural efficacy" was denied, and use of peyote buttons could not therefore be seen as part of natural or medical science. As with all New World substances, there was no precedent in classical or biblical tradition for a defense of Peyote. But Peyote was not seen as entirely ineffective; instead, the imaginal realms that Peyote gave access to were false or delusional, and their only meaning a negative one, that of leading people astray from the true faith. The existence of the imaginal realms themselves was not denied; but Peyote as an agent capable of accessing them was. The approach to these realms must remain symbolic — as it was for Milton. Thus the Inquisition successfully pushed Peyote into the realm of non-existence or legend, which is where, to the Western mind, these plants generally resided, until the nineteenth century, when the search for pharmaceutical medicines and burgeoning interest in primitive culture necessitated a reassessment of these plants and practices that accepted their reality.<sup>5</sup>

Europeans also left records of their encounters with Native American and Siberian shamanism. Although the earliest accounts of these practices were often dismissive, explaining shamanic visions as the product of superstition or deluded imagination, by the eighteenth century, it was known that the Siberian shamans used the fly agaric mushroom as a part of their rituals. In 1724, Lafitau, a Jesuit missionary to Canada, made comparisons between the sweat lodges in which Herodotus' Scythians inhaled cannabis vapors in the fifth century B.C.E. and similar places in use by Native American tribes.<sup>6</sup> Stephan Krascheninnikow, a Russian botanist on one of the Bering expeditions, was one of the first to describe the use of mushroom infusions: "The first symptom of a man's being affected with this liquor is a trembling in all his joints, and in half an hour he begins to rave as if in a fever; and is either merry or melancholy mad, according to his particular constitution. Some jump, dance, and sing; others weep, and are in terrible agonies, a small hole appearing to them as a great pit, and a spoonful of water as a lake."<sup>7</sup>

Later academic expeditions in the second half of the eighteenth century further examined the use of the mushroom. Georg Forster, who had traveled as a child on expeditions in Russia, and as a young man was a part of Cook's second voyage around the world, speculated that folk belief, fueled by religious ecstasy, sexual bliss or intoxicants, was the source of creativity. Accounts of Siberian expeditions were read enthusiastically by European intellectuals and formed part of the basis of a wave of speculation about the origins of man, spanning Vico's *Scienza Nuova* (1725) through to the Encyclopedists and the German pre-Romantics, Herder and Goethe. But these speculations focused on the generally aesthetic quality of the shaman's "performance." Although opium and hashish use could be situated, correctly or not, within a framework of millennia of contact between Europe and Asia, the novelty of Siberian shamanism was such that, like other aspects of "primitive culture," it was viewed as a

kind of pure, elemental human activity, which could provide the original prototypes of civilized culture and symbolic religion as it had developed in Europe. The significance of the mushrooms, as actual, effective agents of altered states was dismissed by anthropologists as late as the 1960s as a degenerate aspect of shamanism — since it did not support the symbolic model of ritual that dominated anthropology at that time.

It was through Hoffmann's fantastic tales that nineteenth century writers brought back the worlds of fantasy and fable, within a new rational and realistic framework that required material agents for journeys into the imaginal realms. Hoffmann used plant potions and mysterious powders in several of his tales to transport people into other worlds. Gautier, Hoffmann's chief French disciple, used hashish and opium in his stories. Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* (1865) continued the fantasy tradition, adding the element of childhood to the motifs that protect the fantasy dimension from the inquisitions of the real.

Carroll was familiar with the world of narcotics through friendships with users such as Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Henry Kingsley; he also owned a copy of *Stimulants and Narcotics* (1864), by the English toxicologist Francis Anstie, which reviewed the psychoactive substances available at the time.<sup>8</sup> More specifically, Carroll had read Mordecai Cooke's recently published books on intoxicants, *The Seven Sisters of Sleep* (1860) and *Plain and Easy Account of British Fungi* (1862), with their descriptions of Siberian amanita use.

At first, it generally produces cheerfulness, afterwards giddiness and drunkenness, ending occasionally in the entire loss of consciousness. The natural inclinations of the individual become stimulated. The dancer executes a pas d'extravagance, the musical indulges in a song, the chatterer divulges all his secrets, the oratorical delivers himself of a philippic, and the mimic indulges in caricature. Erroneous impressions of size and distance are common occurrences, equally with the swallower of amanita and hemp. The experiences of M. Moreau with haschisch are repeated with the fungus-eaters of Siberia; a straw lying in the road becomes a formidable object, to overcome which, a leap is taken sufficient to clear a barrel of ale, or the prostrate trunk of a British oak."

With astounding prescience, Carroll took these descriptions of the effects of the amanita mushroom and turned them into a set of mathematical operations, which could be executed on a young girl and the world she perceived. Alice changes size when she drinks from bottles not marked "poison," or eats from cakes which say "EAT ME." "First, however, she waited for a few minutes to see if she was going to shrink any further: she felt a little nervous about this; 'for it might end, you know,' said Alice, 'in my going out altogether, like a candle. I wonder what I should be like then?' And she tried to fancy what the flame of a candle is like after it is blown out, for she could not

remember ever having seen such a thing."<sup>10</sup>

Alice encounters a caterpillar perched on top of a mushroom, smoking from a hookah, who questions her and then leaves, advising her that she can grow larger or smaller, according to which side of the perfectly circular mushroom she eats from. The games with logic at the Mad Hatter's Tea Party, the tricks played with visual space by the Cheshire Cat, just about any episode in the book in fact, resonates with psychedelic experience. Why?

Carroll's particular genius was to form a fantasy world from the "logical" outcome of a certain number of statements and questions, using the intermediary of the magical potion. Alice knows that "something interesting will happen" when she drinks from another bottle without a label; she knows she will become larger; what she does not know is what the intensity or duration of the effect will be. It is all a question of dosage, as Jünger says. Radically different worlds appear accordingly. Carroll replicated, through logical operations, the chemically triggered alterations of cognitive functioning that users of psychedelics experience, and which had already been described in a book that Carroll had read.

It was thus a properly material, "modern" imaginal space that Carroll created. Rather than belonging to the world of religion – or the world of the fantastic tale – the Alice books found a home in the Victorian world of the "innocent child," as fantastic a place as Elven realms or the impenetrable world of savages. Several books – as well as a host of childrens' TV series – have inadvertently or not, continued this line of research.<sup>11</sup> Most recently, *Teletubbies*, with its polymorphous alien beings stumbling through a mescalinian color-saturated landscape, and the strange doubling/repetition of whole dialogues and scenes, has been "accused" of playing with drug motifs, while being adopted by a generation of MDMA-popping students for whom its 9 a.m. timeslot makes it perfect late-night viewing.

An equally extraordinary fantasy work from the end of the nineteenth century is John Uri Lloyd's *Etidorhpa* (1897).<sup>12</sup> Lloyd grew up in New York state and moved to Cincinnati where he became laboratory manager for a drug firm and established a quarterly journal, *Drugs and Medicines of North America*, with his brother. *Etidorhpa* is a fantasy novel in which the narrator wanders through a hollow earth realm until he reaches the realm of the drunkards. There he is offered a fungal potion, which sends him into "an extravagant dream of higher fairy land"<sup>13</sup> where he meets the goddess Etidorhpa ('Aphrodite' spelt backwards). The narrator is cautious in his attitude, reviling intemperance as a destroyer of mankind, but affirming that intoxication, if "properly employed, may serve humanity's highest aims." He reviews the various intoxicants of man, lists most of the substances Cooke describes in *Seven Sisters of Sleep*, and speculates about the nature of soma.<sup>14</sup>

The narrator travels through a series of cavernous spaces in which beings deformed by drunkenness tempt him with visions, which he refuses when he perceives the Satanic nature of the tempters. Finally, Etidorhpa offers him a vision of transcendental synaesthetic bliss, after which he returns to this world, to muse on the relationship between eternity and time.

After this section, the author adds the following note:

If in the course of experimentation, a chemist should strike upon a compound that in traces only would subject his mind and drive his pen to record such seemingly extravagant ideas as are found in the hallucinations herein pictured ... and yet could he not know the end of such a drug, would it not be his duty to bury the discovery from others, to cover from mankind the existence of such a noxious fruit of the chemist's or pharmacist's art? To sip once or twice of such a potent liquid, and then to write lines that tell the story of its power may do no harm to an individual on his guard, but mankind in common should never possess such a penetrating essence.<sup>15</sup>

We do not know whether Lloyd himself ever discovered such a chemical, although he was certainly in a position where he could experiment.

Horror, science fiction, fantasy, erotica, travel narratives and children's literature: all are genres that deal with the "unreal" in one way or another. The unreal is the place where all that is feared or desired, that which cannot be spoken about, resides. Writers have talked about magical plants that produce visions in the spaces opened up by these genres, safe in the knowledge that they pose no danger because they are merely fictional devices. The boundaries around these spaces are rigorously policed, for there is always a danger of leakage, of contamination of the real by fantasy products. The more that motifs like the mushroom or the hookah are used as generic symbols of fantasy worlds, the more emptied of their actual, historical significance as shamanic substances or smoking apparatus they become. At their most hollowed out, the mushroom and hookah are nothing more than "pure conventions." But the intensity with which certain symbols are consigned to the oblivion of the unreal (and the literature on drugs is full of this particular strategy) is itself indicative of an unresolved tension, a fear that that which has been banished may return. Just as the Renaissance poets' use of magical plants was a response to the persistence of Pagan plant knowledge, the fantasy space that Carroll and Lloyd explore was informed by knowledge that there were substances that produced precisely the altered states that are to be found in their books.

Footnotes for this article can be found at:

<http://tripzine.com/articles.asp?id=irfootnotes>



## Remixing the Matrix

An Interview with Paul D. Miller,  
aka DJ Spooky

by Erik Davis

I first met Paul Miller over a decade ago, when we both scribbled for *The Village Voice*. At the time he was living in the Gas Station, an avant-garde ruin in the East Village's Alphabet City that was heavy on metal assemblages, rodents, and chaotic all-night affairs. I recognized a voodoo symbol on one of the DJ Spooky that Subliminal Kid stickers he had plastered around the office as a *veve* belonging to the *loa* Legba. So we got into a heady conversation about tricksters and messengers, LSD and Marshall McLuhan. Over the years I've seen his own trickster messages reach a widening range of audiences, from hip-hop kids to European media snobs to Afro-futurist artistes. His latest music reflects this scramble: *Optometry*, a jazzbo outing where Miller's turntables and sampled upright bass round out the amazing sounds of Matthew Shipp and William Parker; *Modern Mantra*, a scratchy-fuzzy-mystic-beat-void DJ mix; and *Standard Time*, a limited edition video/music CD about time zones that came out of an artistic collaboration between Miller and Julian LaVerdiere, the artist responsible for the World Trade Center memorial sculpture.

Besides Miller's most visible (and lucrative) career as a musician and DJ, he also wears the hats of a media theorist, painter, sculptor, SF writer, and all-around everywhere man. In addition to his current music projects, which include the score for an independent film about Latino drag racing, Miller is looking forward to two book releases: *Sound Unbound*, a collection of articles he edited about music and media, as well as *Rhythm Science*, a book of his own essays that will come out on MIT Press. The web component of his recent Marcel Duchamp remixology project can be seen at [http://www.moca.org/museum/dg\\_detail.php?dgDetail=pmiller](http://www.moca.org/museum/dg_detail.php?dgDetail=pmiller). He also shows up occasionally to present bits of a large work in progress: a video and audio remix of D.W.Griffith's *Birth of a Nation*.

Some might say that Miller stretches himself too thin, and that his work can be more dabbling than definitive. But classic definition is not what he's after. His is a genuinely multi-tasking consciousness, and he does what he does in the spirit of the global mix, of trying something new, of constantly rewiring our planet's mad cultural networks. Like all tricksters, the dude cannot be boxed in, and he's fast on his feet (though he always claims he wants to slow down). I caught up with him in San Francisco, where he was in town to DJ a gathering of Creative Commons, a group developing novel systems of copyright that encourage collaboration rather than corporate control. He had just flown in from Monaco, and radiated his usual friendly energy and hectic enthusiasm.

**TRIP: Tell me about what Creative Commons is about and why you got hooked up with them.**

PM: Creative Commons is a public domain archive basically. It's chaired by Lawrence Lessig, a cyberlawyer who argued the Eldred vs. Ashcroft case in front of the Supreme Court [a failed attempt to overturn the nefarious Sonny Bono act, which extends the rights of big copyright holders like Disney]. There's a debate ranging on the Internet and among people involved in sampling culture in general over ownership issues. Today Mickey Mouse is being used to push this whole notion of extended copyright to the point of drying up any sense of collective use. That's not what creates new objects; that just controls the idea of content and limits it.

I'm fascinated with pushing that envelope, with this idea of collective memory. Part of my whole vibe is creating a sense of irreverence towards how memories are contained in objects, software, and the net.

**How do you approach this issue in your own work? How do you deal with people who appropriate your own stuff?**

There's a middle ground. The term on the Internet is "creative co-authorship." So as long as it's interesting and done in an intriguing way, and at the same time at least partly acknowledges the music as the original vector for it... it's a transitional area. So part of me is like, yeah, probably get in touch, just drop me a quick line. I don't go crazy over it. It's just making sure things are clear and cool.

**Creative Commons isn't interested in a totally "free" environment, but in coming up with ways to balance certain kinds of controlled copyright with loose distribution and use.**

You have two extremes. One is copyright anarchy, where you just run with whatever. The other extreme is you have lawyers looking to control aspects of almost everything that could possibly be in a song, like a breath of air, or a snare drum, or a high hat... If they had their way, you'd be clearing every tiny discrete sound on a track, which doesn't make any sense. It's an immense amount of paperwork.

I'm dealing with this on the scale of an indie kind of scene. But as the scale gets bigger, like with Madonna sampling stuff, then you need to be reasonable. If someone's going to make a fortune, maybe it should be a percentage. It's looking at the creative act as a reasonable dialogue in pop culture instead of an irrational, litigious kind of thing.

**You just flew in from Monaco. Why were you there?**

I did a collaboration with Gaetan Morletti, the Principal Dancer of the Royal Ballet of Monaco. They commissioned a work and we did a live piece at the Royal Ballet Showcase.

**How much do you prepare for something like that?**

I send them elements in advance and say, basically

you're going to hear a remix of this. It's kind of the basic template, and then I put it together live.

**Are the things you sent them samples of other people, or your own stuff?**

It's mostly my own stuff, 98%. If there's other stuff, it's very discrete... small sounds, nothing like a drum beat. These days everyone and their mother is DJing, so you don't want to just send a basic loop. You've got to give people a sense of total context and environment, and that means you've got to be a lot more creative, and really open up some new space with your material. It's a lesson learned, because it's part of the creative act to actually make new stuff. The whole scene now is saturated.

**Do you feel in some ways the saturation is forcing another kind of creativity to emerge? You can't just keep using samples and remixing found sounds. Even turntablism sometimes seems like a museum piece now, a sort of fetish for an earlier gesture of recombination.**

It's archive fever. We're in a delirium of saturation. We're never going to remember anything exactly the way it happened. It's all subjective. Because of that, you're looking at an eruption of, for lack of a better word, a dyslexic thinking process. Do you want to have a bored delirium or a more exciting one?

**In some ways, this oversaturated sampling process seems analogous to the eruption of excess and delirium that psychedelics produce. In the 1960s, McLuhan talked about LSD as a preparation for the electronic age. Do you think there's some kind of connection there?**

Yeah. Most drugs come out of either military or biological or pharmaceutical research. They're like military applications to condition troops for different environments. A lot of research into painkillers was done in World War II — imagine the kind of pain you feel when there are bullets flying over your head and your leg gets shattered. Or what kind of speed you need if you are in an airplane and need to stay awake. Drugs are definitely looking at the idea of man/machine interface and conditioning the meat to be able to deal with the machines.

At the end of the day, it's all on the screen. Drugs are like a graphical user interface. I can almost tell what substances people are on depending on what mix they're doing. There's the herb mix, there's the acid mix, there's the Ecstasy-style mix. Each of them gives a certain kind of interface quality. They summon up different kinds of psychological projections when you hear them. Depending on what kind of substances you've done yourself, the sounds might evoke those same memories. Or they might even be able to give a foreground/background kind of thing, where you're looking at the psychology of the listener being bounced back off the environment that the creator has made.

You can think of it as a subtle psychology of industrial

culture — what I like to call the archaeology of the subconscious. Somehow the technology has conditioned the very way we communicate. It's like a different kind of language. A lot of times people use dead words, so to speak, and that's when a mix doesn't work. What you do as a DJ is to breathe new life into it and see what happens, and that's what sampling's about. It's speaking with the voices of the dead, playing with that sense of presence and absence. If the mix doesn't evoke something, it doesn't work.

**Your music doesn't sound "trippy" the way a psychedelic band does, but there is a sense of constantly flowing through different structures without having a fixed sense of ground. Have your own experiences with psychedelics helped you deal with all those multiple levels happening at once?**

I can't say there's one formula to the structure of my sound, but there's definitely this sense of a syncopation of all these different layers of culture that move at different rhythms and tempos: African-American culture, academic culture, digital media. I love the word "syncopation." *Syncope* means a small gap in consciousness, and when you play with those gaps and make a mesh out of those presences and absences, that's a beat. Everything is about pulling together these disparate fragments. If there was one thing that African-American experience is about, it's pulling together these tasty fragments of the shattered culture.

I feel like psychedelic culture flows through white America and black American culture along different vectors. I'm a product of Washington, D.C., and African-American culture in D.C. is highly segregated. When I did my first series of psychedelic interventions, I was a teenager, college age. Some of my weirder experiences were staying up all night and just walking around Washington, D.C., and seeing all the weird monuments. Class and social hierarchy issues are just etched like a rubber stamp on the whole zone. Seeing African-American kids playing plastic buckets in front of the White House, weird shit like that, that's what D.C. is about. There's more Haitians and *vodoun* kind of scenes in D.C. than in the South.

**What kind of area did you grow up in? Was it predominantly black or was it more of a mix?**

It was more like an academic community, and also sort of a cultural scene. My Mom had a store called Toast and Strawberries right off of Dupont Circle. Also a lot of the punk rock scene was going on, a lot of the conceptual political art scene. Fugazi was coming out, Minor Threat, Bad Brains. A lot of experimental culture in general, but at the same time, in the black culture scene, a lot of poetry was going on.

To me it was much easier to jump between zones and scenes.

It's amazing, to this day, if somebody gets into a beat,

there's a whole structure that goes into that rhythm to the point where you can actually see exactly what people's tastes are, what weird niche they inhabit. Your taste and preferences become mapped onto the specific structure of the rhythm. So hip hop is a lifestyle, like clothing or a line of cars. J.Lo just did a song about the Cadillac Escalade, so all of a sudden they're saying, "As in the J.Lo song..." People will rhyme about being in their Lexus going to go buy some Moët and have a good time. It's an entire lifestyle. But that's the end result of advertising as the American dream.

**Beats form certain mnemonics, like sonic logos that carry whole lifestyle connotations. But remix culture gestures towards the possibility of not getting stuck in any one groove. DJ Spooky is certainly a brand, but at the same time you're this curious multi-tasking guy, grabbing from lots of things and just going forward and making it work without being too focussed or careerist. Some people accuse you of being a dabbler, but you are connecting between lots of different spaces.**

I've never felt like I should be a careerist. It's like the summer I first did this liquid acid, walking through D.C. A good friend of mine committed suicide that summer and put me into this weird depression thing. I was actually studying to be a diplomat. That's when I said: Do I want to do this? Seeing these weird monuments, and people rushing around, going through the office doors like in *Koyaanisqatsi* or *Metropolis*... It gave me this weird sinking feeling, a haunted feeling. I can't deal with that.

We're living in a world of absolute standards of identity, time, regulation. It's a highly regimented culture, but it's so subtle that it's almost totalitarian, far more than anything the Soviets could have ever achieved.

**Where is the real heart of the control, of the regimentation?**

Personally I think it's about living in a culture of highly structured time — seconds, minutes, days. You have to fit all aspects of life into that interface, the same as you would a graphical user interface like Pro Tools, putting all of your expression into these different tracks and layers and making a mesh of it so it's synchronized and syncopated.

**It's like the way people fill out their datebooks, with those little slots.**

In the '60s, with psychedelic culture, you saw this first burst of trying to break out of that. The drugs shattered people. They took acid and said, "Holy shit!" Psychedelic culture disrupted all the regimentation and let all this new energy out. Now you have multiculturalism, you have respect for diversity of sexual orientation, of women's rights, all these things. After the '60s, mainstream America viewed that as a problem or a mistake, whereas it's just about being human instead of

being some weird, programmed android.

When you look at Ginsberg and all those 1960s and 1950s guys, they were like neo-Romantics. But in literary or musical circles these days, there's just a deep confusion about how to break out of the system and really be outside of it. *The Matrix* – that's one of my favorite parables around. It's the whole Plato's cave thing, where you see the shadow of the projection of reality and you take that as the basic rhythm of what's going on.

**Do you think there are ways in which drugs can help illuminate that trap or are they just another dimension of it? In *The Matrix*, Neo takes the red pill. Is there still something in psychedelic consciousness that enables people to break out?**

With drugs, there is no one answer. It's all dualities, paradoxes, twisted involutions. In a way, it's healthy, but as human beings we also seek standardization. It's like a hive thing. We're more insects than the insects perhaps. I remember reading the other day that they found a huge ant colony that stretched for like 3000 miles. You could say the same thing of the East Coast megalopolis – stretching from Boston down to Atlanta... We're the same thing.

I don't think the drugs clarify anything. I think they just diffuse the interface a little bit and allow you to see the cracks in the system. But unless you can walk through those cracks, or think out of the cracks, you don't know if it's just another illusion.

**Do you think there's any way out of that loop?**

You'd have to make some sort of intense cognitive break with the psychological/perceptual architecture of what makes you a normal human. In the Robert Heinlein book *Stranger in a Strange Land*, the kid's raised by aliens, and his whole perceptual architecture is conditioned differently by them. Philip K. Dick, Samuel Delaney, all these science fiction writers were engaging with standardization, with trying to figure out how to think outside the box. The tragedy is that there is no outside the box. You're just in another box, in another box, like a Russian matryoshka doll.

**Have you ever felt close to some kind of radical cognitive break like that?**

You just never know. It's a hall of mirrors. Unless there's some scientific way to get proof. It's like the H.P. Lovecraft story ["From Beyond"] where this guy can see in different dimensions and then he gets hunted by this one creature who notices him. We do live in many dimensions. That's actually the physics, the scientific reality.

**Speaking of multiple dimensions, do you have a very rich dream life?**

I dream all the time. Around March or April this year, I was in some kind of weird mood or humor, and my dreams went geometric. Lines and points and structures.

All kind of vectors. Nowadays my dreams are more narrative. I've done a lot of exercises to try to remember dreams. Dreaming is reflective. You are taking a step back and looking at your own trajectory.

How do you condition yourself to deal with things through your dreams and aspirations and ideas of how you can be? There's an old KRS rhyme where he's like, "You want to be rich? Picture wealth and put yourself in the picture. Health is your mental wealth." I like the idea of mental wealth. It's not about having a big car. It's the idea that you are your currency. If you hold yourself high, you will be able to attract all sorts of different exchange rates. Lots of people's imaginations are so conditioned by the consumer thing, that's their dream. That's the picture they want to put themselves in. Pretty standard and boring picture. That's what I like about Burning Man. It's a different dream.

**You first attended Burning Man in 1995. What do you think about the festival?**

I consider Burning Man to be the near future, like you're living six months to two years into the future. There will be what I call Burning Man moments where you are walking down a street in New York and there's an accident, or a car flies by, or there's an awkward intervention of something into the fabric of normal urbanism, like when a homeless guy walks by mumbling to himself wearing a fedora. That's a Burning Man moment.

I look at Burning Man as a postmodern carnival. I'm one of these kinds of guys who likes breaking down words, and carnival means "carni-vale" – throwing the flesh, you know, being able to wear all these different masks and being able to switch identities. Afro-Caribbean culture and a lot of southern European culture is fascinated with carnival, with the festival of the saints. These are all neo-pagan eruptions that Christianity somehow absorbed. But when you apply that Dionysian search for some eruption of irrationality into a very regimented world... it's madness by normal standards.

**How does Burning Man compare to raves?**

To me, raves are trying to balance some kind of madness with standardization, which is the beats. The people dancing and hanging out, and the Ecstasy and acid and all that, is just a psychological buffer between seeing the shadow on the wall and realizing you can't get around it. There's an existential quality when you go to really big events. I've seen a whole arena chanting "Who Let The Dogs Out" in unison. It's like Albert Speer, like Hitler using TV to get propaganda messages out during WWII – "Triumph of the Will." Etc etc. The whole thing is intense psychological compartmentalization, and when you look at that gestalt mentality, yeah, DJing is part of the science of regimentation. Is it an avant-garde thing? No, it's just part of the fabric...

**What's your personal attitude towards psychedelics now?**

I've kind of distanced myself from the psychology of psychedelic culture. I DJ'd at Burning Man last year and took some DMT. I felt much more disassociated than before. At the end of the day, that's what it's all about: the logic of things, you do A thus B happens or C happens. But psychedelic culture breaks those associative chains, and makes you feel like everything's without cause and just floating. When I did that heavy psychedelic at Burning Man, I actually felt like my brain had gone past the point of no return. I mean, everything's already fragmented, but it feels like if I touch this stuff ever again, my brain will just fly to pieces.

In general, I haven't done anything over the last year or so – I've had some coffee, some wine. The more I've actually pulled back from stuff, the more it feels like the entire planet is psychedelic — like the geometry of a city seen from above, or seeing ocean waves just near the Mediterranean. Monaco looked like a Walt Disney recreation, but then you realize that Disney is just recreating that weird palace vibe. We live in a culture of relentless quotation. You see something, you absorb it, and it pops up unconsciously in your next thing. After the last time I did DMT at Burning Man, I felt like my brain became Times Square, a kind of boring, rushing collage of conflicting images and ideas, each one demanding its own time and space in my brain.

I think a lot of this stuff is psychologically corrosive. To get any work done, you can't think like that, because you're just outside of any notion of normal language and being able to communicate and deal with things. It takes a lot of psychological integrity to be able to balance between psychedelic culture and being able to maintain and build a normal world and still have that sense of overview. When you talk to some executive guy, they've got just a one-track mentality, because that's what allows them to do their thing. Anybody who wants to do something has to compress.

Once you've done X amount of some substance it actually remodels your perceptions, the architecture of how you experience stuff. You do the drugs and then the drugs do you. When you look at a computer screen, synaesthesia is just there on the surface, like when you touch it and you see little waves bubble away. There are special effects at every level and from every angle.

As an artist, I'm at a paradox, because part of me has that urge to trip. But there's always the sense that once you go past that point of no return, you're in a universe of one, because you're your own language structure, your own mentality. At the peak of any trip you sometimes feel this inability to have any sense of real language. That's what Burning Man felt like: that sense of linguistic loss, of not being able to enunciate normal words or the flows of how you would normally put sentences together. It's post-linguistic or something.

**You've mentioned how psychedelics in white culture and black culture are really different. In general, you don't see too much evidence of black psychedelia, but then you have something like Parliament/Funkadelic, which is like the most insanely flipped out thing that happened in the mid-'70s. What's going on there?**

I think white American culture is kind of fragmented in a way that black American culture isn't. In black America, the pressure to conform is really intense. All the kids will all of a sudden start wearing new Fila gear or the new Nike. In white American culture, the point is to actually to stand out, to be able to cut against the grain of things.

In terms of lifestyle issues, it's fascinating when people start rhyming stuff. That means it's truly attained. When you hear Missy Elliott rhyme about taking Ecstasy and drinking Möet, you know. Or like, "Yo, I'm the dealer man, pusher man, herb guy." Whatever. They always externalize it in a way that leaves you with these paradoxes, because to rhyme about the experience kind of takes away any sense of the magic of individualism. So you are left with this sense of a pre-conditioned emotion.

That's been a real intense trope in black culture for a long time, because you have this sense that, if you leave the crowd, then that means you've left the sense of struggle, and you're supposed to always be in tune with the sense of dynamic struggle and change. I think that makes Afro-American culture an inherently revolutionary culture, but at the same time, it leaves you in stasis, because no one goes outside of it.

**Have you felt kind of torn between the pressure of this group identity and your own desire to discover your own unusual way of dealing with all these different cultures and scenes?**

Yeah, I get it all the time, and I'm pretty mellow. I can only imagine what somebody like Hendrix must have felt. George Clinton was able to be both psychedelic and still in the normal fold. But when you hear Snoop Dogg talking about psychedelic culture – he's always talking about being a freak and freak out – that almost feels very conservative to me. Dr. Dre always talks about Mary Jane, cheeba, but I don't think they engage this kind of psychedelic culture or pot culture that tries to break free of things.

In my music, it's much more about paradox. I mean when you look at the Platonic myth of the shadow on the cave, it could just as easily be perceptual breakdown or something. There's the uncertainty of the box within the box, the Cartesian demon of doubt. To really face that is to say, "Look, we live in a world where you just don't fucking know, and there is no certainty, and so you just make it up as you go and see what happens." But we're not conditioned to want that sense of "the certainty of uncertainty." That's what I try to evoke with my stuff.

In terms of black culture, again, you can't think of things in terms of monolithic styles. It's far more nuanced and bizarre than that. These days the drug of choice for a lot of MCs – at least that you hear rhyming about – is Ecstasy. And if you listen to Timbaland's beats and styles, there was a sharp change about four years ago, when he all of a sudden starting doing what they call the acid sound. One time Donatella Versace threw this after-New Years party and she had me fly out to DJ. Missy Elliott was backstage hanging and they were just chilling but it didn't feel psychedelic. There's times when you're backstage and everything is completely out of whack and you get that feeling, yo, anything could go off. In the last couple years, I've just felt a sense of calmness.

**You've encountered a lot of weird places and situations across the planet. What's the weirdest scene you've been in?**

One of the more intriguing parties I've been to was in Iceland. Björk was having this New Year's Eve party, and all these Icelandic people were just rocking out. That was a couple of years ago, outside of Reykjavik. People were on these glaciers...

**The party was on the ice?**

Yeah.

**Wasn't it terribly cold?**

Yeah, but they get used to it, man.

**People were outside?**

Yeah, the sound system and stuff was outside, on the ice fields. It was dark, this kind of surreal, gray, dawn aura kind of thing, and that was weird. They like hard techno and trance. They have all these mixtures of culture, Inuit and European, and they are also just a really open and friendly people, a fishing culture, a small island. When I got back from that party, I cut all my hair off.

Another bizarre scene was when I was living at the Gas Station on Avenue B. I used to throw these after hours parties, and we'd just leave the door open, and homeless people, crazy people would come through. For one party we put up these TVs, and every TV had static, and they were hanging from these industrial chains on the ceiling. People were coming in off the street, I had no idea who the fuck they were, but they would jump onto the TVs and swing around. The televisions were the only light in the room, and there was crazy music, and then you'd look out and see all this melted metal and burned up sculpture and stuff. Those were weird parties. But that was a different time.

**You live a life that would run most people ragged: you sleep five hours a night, you travel all the time, you're always working on a gazillion projects and collaborations. You don't seem based in any particular spacetime because you're moving around, dealing with different layers of society, all the time. What drives you?**

It's just fun. The world is such a fucking weird place. It's an exquisitely bizarre thing. I'm just happy to be alive in this era. It's truly exciting to travel around just checking out how strange it all is. I'd say this is going to be a century of hyper-acceleration, and I just get a kick out of seeing it. One of my favorite phrases from William Gibson is: "The future is already here, it's just unevenly distributed."

**That hyper-acceleration can be tough to take. When you start to get the feeling that there's too much stuff going on, how do you get grounded?**

You don't. There's always something popping up, something that needs to get done on the phone or email. It's 24/7. But when I really want to chill out, I just take a long bath and put some music on and just sit in the hot water. Actually my plan next year is to decelerate a little bit and take some time off [note to reader: Miller has been saying this as long as I have known him]. I'd like to do more soundtrack work, so I don't do have my economics derived so much from DJing and traveling. Plus I've got a house up in the countryside, so I can just come to New York strictly when necessary. I really want to finish my fiction by early summer, because I've been working on that book forever.

**What's it called?**

It's called *Flow My Blood The DJ Said*. It's this whole involution of what I call control themes, and science fiction, and music and sound.

**How experimental is the writing?**

It started out very experimental, and then I realized, wait a second here, I've got to fine-tune it. Then I brought it back to more of a narrative thing. There's chapters where it's just these rushes of phrases from advertising, weird advertising lingo. I'm fascinated with this catchphrase thing. You see enough of certain phrases, and then the city itself spells a big sentence. Times Square is like that. If you selectively edit between all the information flowing through your mind, the sentence built is like some kind of *Finnegans Wake* James Joyce-type stuff, but it still has some resonance for me. My fiction's like stream of consciousness mixed with media streaming.

**At this point in your career, do you mostly DJ because it's a nice cash flow, or do you still have an investment in being a pop culture figure who throws good parties?**

Well, that depends. My parties and my music are really outside of normal DJ currents. I don't spin at the same rave as a Paul Oakenfold. But at the same time, I love DJing as a hobby. It was never really meant to be my main thing. DJing was meant to be an art project. Imagine having one project take over like that!

Over the next year or so I'm going to be doing a series of conceptual art projects, and migrating out of DJing. I used to pass out stickers saying, "Who is DJ Spooky?"

and cassettes that had stories on them. I'm still doing that. But these days it's much more informal and just kind of fun. So DJ Spooky was a project, and now Paul D. Miller is a project of DJ Spooky, and I'm slowly remixing out of that.

**On your new record *Optometry*, you play some acoustic bass. What's up with that?**

I started studying bass in college. For my senior year recital, I had to do this kind of waltz, and I completely flubbed it. Now when I play stuff, I just sample it. *Optometry* is all samples. I wasn't in the same room as anyone; everyone just gave me elements. Being able to synchronize and put that meshwork together was a really fun kind of thing, but it sounds live. I've got to figure this out, though, because next year I'm going to do more stuff with a band. We're going to take *Optometry* on the road live.

Bass playing is one of those calm kinds of things I do to try and stop thinking. You just play, you hear the sound, and that's it. Everybody has their little gestures that they tune into and repeat. Like some people have prayer beads. For a couple years playing bass was my mellow activity, usually playing alone.

I've always loved jazz too, so *Optometry* is the jazz record I've wanted to make for a while. A lot of people say it sounds happier than the rest of my music. If you actually heard the original stuff, it was chaos — you just had someone squawking their horn for like five minutes, like really aggro free jazz, while someone else's playing crazy drums. The sense of finessing that, of being able to figure out even what tempos or what arrangements to make things around, was fascinating. Free jazz is totally out of the normal DJ beat, pulse, range, style. *Optometry* was a good exercise in structural silence. Most free jazz bands are maximalists, they go and bombard you with all of these heavy sounds. So pulling silence out of that was a really interesting exercise.

**One of the things you've been doing lately is taking the DJ performance and putting it into places where you don't usually see DJ decks, like in art galleries. Do people get what you're trying to do?**

Well, some people love it, some people hate it. I've gotten vicious, bitter reviews by critics. But that's all just fluff. As an artist and writer, I do what I enjoy. If I didn't like it, I wouldn't do it. I think if you follow through with whatever you're into, you can do it. It doesn't matter if it's not consistent, there's a market or niche for every possible endeavor under the sun at this point.

I'm actually at a crossroads myself in terms of trying to figure out the writing stuff, especially this idea of writing as total text.

**What do you mean by total text?**

I'm in the process of editing my first two nonfiction anthologies, *Sound Unbound* and *Rhythm Science*.

I'm going to have multimedia, I'm going to have web, I'm going to do a limited edition CD, I might want to do some performances around them. That's what Wagner was trying to do with the whole idea of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* ["total artwork"]. But that approach is actually more of an African kind of thing in general. In Europe, because of the specialization trip, you had to specialize and just do one thing. But why? I guess I'm just deprogramming out of the specialization thing. Why not have a book that can be HTML code, or a building that's a symphony, or whatever?

**You first got on the map doing music and DJing. You've done sound art, installation, sculpture, painting. You've been working lately with video remixing and getting into the mixology of images. But in many ways you still define yourself primarily as a writer. Why is it important for you to stay tied to the world of writing?**

At the end of the day, you still want to communicate with your fellow human beings. Otherwise it becomes a subjective implosion.

**Yeah, but some people would say that images are now a better form of communication, that text isn't a very good form anymore. It's too slow, for one thing.**

It is, it's all that. In fact it's kind of retro. But that's cool, too. That's why people wear bell bottom jeans. You can always squeeze something out of the past and make it become new.

**But for you, it is about communication.**

It's a puzzle you set for yourself. Being at a crossroads like this, and being uncertain which direction to move, is actually a good thing, because it makes me question everything a lot more. Why do I want to write, why do I want to make a track, why do I want to do this installation? They're all hobbies, which keeps the fun. If I were a dead serious artist guy, who wanted to just strictly be in all the right collections, and network the gallery scene, that's easily done. Same with the DJ circuit. But by being a hobbyist, a kind of flaneur or somebody who jumps around, it keeps things fresh and new. I can only imagine what kind of mentality most people must have doing one thing all their lives. But I guess because I grew up with books, I've always wanted to write one, to add my own book to the bookshelf in my mind or something. How do you feel about writing? You've written almost two books...

**It keeps me sane. I like dabbling in multimedia or doing performance, and I like speaking before audiences a lot. But there's something about the labor or writing and the sense of being part of the continuum of writing that goes back thousands of years. It is a retro form, and in some ways it doesn't quite fit what's happening. The challenge then is to describe or characterize what it feels like to be alive now in the midst of it, but using this other kind of form. My consciousness is still partly in the Gutenberg world. I**

know people who are totally electronic and it's fascinating to see them, but in some ways their consciousness works differently. There's a reflexivity that comes with having to compose and letting language come through you. It's a different speed, there's a slowness there. And the way language is infectious, the way you pick up language from other writers. It's kind of my home base.

Writing becomes your own temple and you just move in and make sure everything flows and the right divinities are in effect.

**Nowadays writing just looks like one more technology, with its pluses and minuses. What have you been thinking about lately in terms of the future?**

These days I've been thinking a lot about universal computing, and how that's going to affect us. It's going to just be psychological after a certain point. Your mind will be the software or whatever. Once you have that density of information in terabytes, and everything's just kind of in the air, what happens after that? That's just around the corner.

Last night, Larry Lessig and I were talking about this idea of artificial scarcity. If you're in a digital world, where anyone can make a copy of anything, what you then need to do is to pull stuff out of the loop and make it become more scarce. That's one of the new economies of scale that he thinks will be going on. It's already started and will slowly evolve.

**Give me an example.**

There are some artists who will only make five copies of a DVD. If they're in the conventional art world, they'll be able to sell them for like \$75,000 each. They're still dealing with the digital medium, but it works: people with the collecting mentality will pick up on that. Another example of artificial scarcity is where Bill Gates is buying up all these images and charging people X amount just to use the images. He set up a bunker and put millions of images in this one place.

**Oh, you mean the paintings, the photographs, the actual physical objects?**

Yeah – the original photos of the objects. It's this bunker in Pennsylvania, buried underground, in this secure thermostatically-controlled, humidity-controlled environment. It has guards and stuff like that. So a bunker of images. That's artificial scarcity.

You have to imagine a world where, on the one hand, basic resources like water and oil are becoming more scarce. That's a *real* scarcity. Digital culture's blossoming like an artificial desert being made over again, because people are actually making more copies of everything. There's more cities in *Sim City* than have ever existed in human history.

But you can't eat that. You can't flush it and you can't drink it, so it's an artificial thing. It's this weird kind of information environment. But how do you sustain the

architecture in your own mind? I'm fascinated with the idea of being able to be in a world where it's not how much information bombards you, but how little you have. *That's* going to be your wealth. Less is more.

**What's scares you the most about our moment now?**

Well, I think if we don't play our cards right in this century, we'll be extinct. I think we'll just play our deck, have a wild party and just wrap up and make room for the next species. There's too much pollution, too much tinkering with DNA, weird biotech weapons, control systems, computer stuff... I don't think there's any real sense of responsible growth or engagement. We're already messing up the oceans, we're already killing off the dolphins and all these different species. Statistically speaking I think we're just around the corner from some mass, twisted thing. Somebody will just get in their airplane with some new biotech weapon and spread it around, or somebody's going to splash a whole city full of some virus. Today huge devastation can be brought about just by a couple of bugged-out people. And there are a lot of bugged-out people.


**You're in the special position of going around the world and meeting lots of interesting and very different people. Despite cultural diversity, are you getting the feeling that everyone is starting to feel the same way about the state of things?**

Yeah, I definitely think that anyone who's watching the world knows that, yo, shit is mega fucked up. You can't walk down the street without feeling this sense of empathy or pain for some crazy person. You catch their eye, and you realize this is a shattered psychology, somebody who just got fucked by the zone they grew up in. I think humans are building systems that are psychologically devastating to ourselves, far more pervasively than at any other time in history. And that's just our own psychology. Forget about the environment or the air we breathe or the ocean we're swimming in. I think that most people who are even vaguely aware feel this giddy sense that something's wrong and things are really fucked up. It's pretty hard to miss the signs. Unless you're Bush.

*Erik Davis is the author of Technosis: Myth, Magic & Mystery in the Age of Information. He has written for Wired, Gnosis, The Village Voice, and Feed, is a contributing editor to Trip.*



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# Negativland



Since 1980, Negativland have been at the forefront of underground audio collage, helping to establish it as a unique and legitimate genre. Their cultural critique landed them in hot water in 1991, when their single *U2* — a savage parody of “I Still Haven’t Found What I’m Looking For” intercut with Casey Kasem spewing obscenities about the band during outtakes from his radio show — got them nearly sued into oblivion by Kasem and Island Records. Undeterred, one of their follow-up projects, an album called *Dispepsi*, takes dozens of Pepsi commercials as source material for a witty, sharp skewering of the world of advertising, and in 1999 they released an EP with Chumbawumba called *The ABCs of Anarchism*. Along the way, they became known as experts on the topic of intellectual property and copyright laws, giving lectures around the world on the topic, and coined the phrase “culture jamming,” which found its way into the pop culture headspace.

Their new project, however, is a step in a unique direction for the group. *Deathsentences for the Polished and Structurally Weak* is a full color book with an accompanying CD. The book juxtaposes photos of junkyard wrecks with letters found in each wreck, while the CD provides a surreal noisecape to help set the scene in the reader’s mind. Surprising and compelling, *Deathsentences* demonstrates that Negativland continue to be aesthetic innovators. We sat down with one of the band’s founders, Mark Hosler, to chat about advertising, corporate media, intellectual property issues, and reading other people’s mail.

### **TRIP: What inspired the *Deathsentences* project?**

MH: A member of the group, Richard Lyons, who sometimes used to make extra money by buying used cars, fixing them up, and selling them, was in a wrecking yard looking for a part. He found a car that he had once owned in the yard, and since he had sold it, it had clearly been in a terrible accident and been cut open with the jaws of life to get people out, and he was poking around in the car and he found stuff that had been left in the car. He was very intrigued by the whole thing, and started poking around in more cars, and finding all sorts of stuff that people had left behind. He had a disposable camera and he started taking pictures of the cars and saving the things he found. He eventually ended up with enough interesting things that he decided to make a little color Xerox book and make copies and pass it around to all of us in *Negativland* and a few friends. And we all really liked it. We thought it was really interesting. Everyone had a really kind of intense, strong reaction to it, and everyone's reaction was very different. It was just very open, very blank in a way, very open to interpretation. People thought it was funny, sad, poignant, voyeuristic, disturbing, all kinds of stuff.

And then what really kicked it into being a full-on project for us was that a collage art friend of ours, Sean Tejeratchi, who does *Craphound*, was in touch with Ira Glass of *This American Life*, the radio show on NPR, and they were doing a show called "Other People's Mail." They were just talking to people who had found other people's letters. And Sean said to Ira, "Oh, *Negativland* has this thing they're doing..." And they came to us thinking it was more of a full on project than it actually was. We were just fooling around with this stuff. But they wanted to see it, they really really liked it, and they ended up working with Richard – Richard has a beautiful radio voice – who wrote text and did a whole segment on *This American Life*. And *that* got an even greater reaction from people who didn't know anything about our group at all. Listeners to that show were really interested, and again had a wide range of reactions, and that was when we all said, well, this is great, it's taken on some kind of weird life of its own, *we're* not even sure what this project's about on some level, let's make it into our next release!

So as we worked on creating the whole package, we decided to make a soundtrack to go with the book. What was really, really difficult was that all the usual *Negativland* approaches that we were throwing at it didn't work, because we always tend to want to do stuff that's funny, that has a lot of goofiness in it, that has layers of meaning and lots of intentionally confusing fingers pointing in all different directions about what our work might mean or might not mean. We kept trying all the usual *Negativland* tactics because that's how we work, and we kept saying, nope, that doesn't work, that doesn't work, that doesn't work. The project went through a

whole lot of different iterations of how we thought to design it and how do we put it together. And also, our original packaging ideas were way too expensive. How do you make something that conceptually fits the project, is super cool in design, and doesn't cost a bazillion dollars to make? So very gradually we came around to the finished package, which is that the book now looks somewhat like it's some kind of an automotive manual, but it's not quite clear what, and it's inside of a jacket sleeve that looks sort of like something you might put your automotive records in, your car manual, your receipts from your brake job, something like that, but it's not exactly clear what that is either, and the CD doesn't look like it's any kind of music CD at all, it's just some kind of audio demonstration disc for your car stereo. And, funnily enough for us, none of it is funny! So at every level of the project, we kept deciding to make it more blank and open to whatever people might think it is.

**Many of the letters had a lot of poignancy to them, and were really kind of sad.**

Some of these folks are barely literate, in and out of jail and drug rehab programs, fighting alcoholism, getting abortions, boyfriends who are crack addicts...

**It was kind of stark to see that language so plainly. I don't get exposed to that... mailing lists are the way that I get much of my interaction with my friends and my subculture, and everyone there is relatively literate...**

Same with me. Same with all of us in *Negativland*. Finding that stuff was very much a glimpse into a whole world that I'm not a part of. My friends are not in and out of jail, my friends are not in rehab, my friends can spell and communicate pretty well, and so we found that to be really interesting to bring that stuff out in a creative project. But doing that could be really touchy, almost like, for example, being a white middle class male person trying to deal with issues of race or gender in an art project. So that was another reason why the project really needed to present this stuff in an interesting, non-patronizing and evocative way, but leave the ultimate meaning up to you. And we did try writing an afterword that explained everything, we wrote an intro, we tried all those approaches of laying it all out and giving an explanation, and we decided we just didn't like it. Having no explanation does mean there'll be this small percentage of people that are just totally mystified and put off by it, but mostly it seemed to us like it was a stronger work that way. If you want to check it out and spend time with it, then by not explaining it, it draws you in and gets you to do the work, and that gets you more engaged.

**The CD was the piece that kept me from my reflexive desire to try to find the overall, linear story, which of course doesn't exist... you could put the CD on shuffle, and page randomly through the book, and what you get is this very**

bizarre slice of life, where you're walking through this graveyard of vehicles, imagining the worst possible fates that could have befallen the passengers, and the letters provide eerie snapshots into these unknown lives.

Right. Was this a letter they wrote and never sent? Was this a letter they got from somebody else? My mind makes up stories to explain the world, and I guess we all do this. I know as I go through my life, every time I go someplace new, or meet a new person, or have a new experience, I'm always trying to make sense of it with a story. So I find myself making up all these stories when I read the thing. The other thing that we struggled with a lot, a seemingly minor thing but a huge thing to figure out, was that the letters we found are all presented the same size, they're all quite small. We could have made them big enough to read, but we liked focusing more on the text by presenting the text of the letters separately in big block letters. The book is not so much about the actual found thing, but the found thing's just sort of there as supporting evidence. I kind of thought of it as an archeological presentation.

**It's a jarring effect actually to see text that was really professionally typeset, yet thoroughly illiterate in places. It was hard for me to accept that there wasn't a proofreader taking care of all of that.**

Oh boy, we went through it so carefully to make sure we got it all... We had to make sure the printer knew about that. "You're going to get this project, and don't be confused by all the typos."

**So how has it been received? I saw a little blurb about the project in *Newsweek*. Are you getting good press on this in general? The pop culture part of me is curious.**

Well, just so you know, you can get a nice review in *Newsweek*, which goes out to a million and a half people, and it'll only help you sell a few thousand copies of your project! We've gotten some great press and some bad press. It's been mixed, and we expected that. I've heard reactions from fans of our work who are almost angry at us for doing this, really disappointed. This is *not* what they expected from us. "I want that funny cut up stuff that you do so I can quote little bits of your funny tapes to my friends as we drive around town."

**That's a shame, because I thought this was a great addition to the Negativland body of work. It still had the Negativland voice to me.**

It's still the found aesthetic.

**But it was a unique mood for me from what I'm familiar with of your work. Unlike something like *Dispepsi* or the *U2* stuff, I could envision listening to this CD under a wider array of circumstances. I could imagine taking that CD and divorcing it from the book and listening to it while writing, for instance, and having it be the soundtrack to a range of dark or absurd or surreal moods.**

We're also getting really wonderful reactions from

people who really like it and who appreciate the fact that we did something that risked alienating people, and are saying, yes, great, good for you, that's great you took a risk and made this thing. I think for us, it helps to remind us that the whole idea of Negativland was that it was just an umbrella under which this loose knit group of people could do whatever the heck they wanted: sound, movies, books, radio, performances, whatever we wanted to do as long as we all thought it was good stuff. Unfortunately... we had to borrow quite a lot of money to put the project out. It was really expensive to do it the way we wanted to do it, and we did it as cheap as we could figure out how to do it and keep it really, really cool. But I think we will basically break even, that's it. Back when I wasn't living off of Negativland, breaking even would be just great. But now that I'm trying to survive off it, if you work on a project for three years and thousands of hours, and you just break even...

**Well, you seem savvy enough about pop culture to know certain ways you could take projects that would be more commercial. Do you just inherently reject that approach? How much does that enter into what you're doing?**

No, I don't think we have a grasp of how to do that, to steer a project in a certain way so that it will sell better. We've done these projects that have gotten a lot of attention, like the *U2* project, or *Helter Stupid*, or *Dispepsi*, but they were just intuitive responses to the material we found and the world we live in, because of course we're always inspired by what we find. We don't search out targets; we get inspired by the stuff we find, and build projects around that, and that's completely what that is. Richard found those letters and that's where he got the inspiration that led to this project. So I do think that part of the strength of the work we've done over the years, particularly the work that we're more well known for, is that they were very intuitive, kind of organic reactions to the bombarding world of pop culture and media that we're living in. We weren't calculatedly sitting down and saying, "Hey, we need to get in trouble. How can we do that? Let's come up with a list of ideas on how to get in trouble." I think if that's how we operated, our work would seem really contrived and stiff.

**You had the experience at one point of actually being approached by an ad agency.**

Yeah, Weiden & Kennedy, an ad agency based in Portland. They're gigantic. They do the ad campaigns for Microsoft and Nike. They're considered to be a "cutting edge" advertising firm. When we were working on the *Dispepsi* project, both [Negativland founder] Don Joyce and myself pretty much simultaneously got phone calls from them. They wanted to hire Negativland to create these radio ads for Miller Genuine Draft Beer. We were right in the middle of doing a project on advertising, so it was a depressing, sort of shocking, but very healthy kind of wake-up call. The degree to which these people

try to appropriate and absorb the people that are appropriating and critiquing *them*... it knows no bounds. These ad people thought it would be really cool to hire Negativland. They wanted to give us *ads* to cut up and mock and manipulate and do our Negativland "thing" to. Since they were offering a lot of money – \$25,000 or so – both myself and Don thought, "Wow, we'd like that money, that sounds great. Is this an opportunity we could do something with?" Because over the years when things have happened to us, like when we've gotten in trouble, we've looked at that as opportunities, not problems. In this case, my brain was doing the same thing: "Can we somehow subvert these guys and do something interesting with this, and turn the tables on them?" And what I then realized was, "Wait a minute, they called us because they want me to be thinking exactly what I'm thinking right now! That's what they want the ad to be." So then I realized that we'd been had, we were fucked. There wasn't any way you *could* out-think them.

And I've heard people say, "Well, you could have just taken the money and used it for your own projects." I think that's the rationale a lot of people would use. But I think for us, given some of the content of our work and how we're perceived, if we had taken that money, I feel like it would make our work seem like a farce, and I don't see how we'd be seen as having any integrity. Another thing is, I just feel like *somebody* has to say "no" to these kind of guys, you know? The whole notion of "selling out" has now become almost passé. It's become "quaint," which I think is really sad. And I think that's partly because our lives are now so circumscribed by corporate interests, by corporate ways of thinking, by the corporate cultural and economic model, that we internalize it. It doesn't matter how lefty you are or how right wing you are. We do internalize those things and they come out in how we think and how we act. And so the notion now that there's even any alternative... it's like, "integrity is stupid, just give up." And I worry about this. I worry about kids growing up who don't even know what an independent bookstore is like. You don't know what the experience is of even being in one. You'll never know it, because there's only Barnes & Noble. I think that's what's happening, and it seems tragic.

Allen Ginsburgh got asked to do a Gap ad. He did it, he took all the money and he put it into his Naropa Institute and used it for scholarships for students. Yoko Ono took money from Nike for use of the Beatles song "Revolution" and donated that money to charity, she didn't keep it. But I still think it's terrible that they did those things, because I still think the cumulative effect of seeing all of these bits of our culture, particularly iconic parts of oppositional culture and fringe counterculture, it just feels like this pathetic diminishment of these wonderful, beautiful, amazing things that humans have created. It's as if the only value that these things ultimately have is how they can be hooked up to a product to get you to buy

them. It just makes me feel like shit when I see it.

### **Did Pepsi ever have a reaction to your *Dispepsi* album?**

Oh yeah, they sure did. We got a very nice little segment on NPR because of that, actually. We were preparing to be sued. We had a team of five lawyers, all of whom were volunteering their time. We were preparing legal briefs to respond to a judge, in case they came after us with some sort of injunction. We were being told, "If they come after you, it'll be really fast, and really hard, and you need to strategize *now* for how to respond." Those lawyers also advised us, "If you don't want to get sued, don't put it out, but if you're going to put it out, choose your battles wisely. Don't put the word 'Pepsi' anywhere on the cover, because they can sue you for trademark infringement. If they're going to sue you, force them to sue you for copyright infringement, where you have a very defensible case." That's why we took the name off the cover. But then we came up with a fun solution to that problem, which was to put a nice sticker on the front that said, "Due to the limitations of U.S. trademark law, we cannot put the name of this record on the cover. Call the Negativland Word-Of-Mouth Hot Line to find out." So we actually thought that the solution to the problem was far more interesting than if we'd put the name on the cover.

Pepsi listened to it, their lawyers checked it out, they definitely wondered what we were up to, and they decided to do nothing. This resulted in a very funny quote from a Pepsi spokesperson, who said, "It's no *Abbey Road*, but it's a pretty good listen." And I think they were just saying, "We can take a joke, ha ha ha, we'll let it go." So when Pepsi declined to sue us, it took some of the drama out of it, but we were also very relieved. I did *not* want to go through another lawsuit. None of us did. They're really, really horrible. We didn't want to go through it, yet at the same time, we felt strongly enough about these issues that we did put the record out and we did want to take that risk. We thought it was still worth doing. I think what was interesting about Pepsi's response was, here is a gigantic, multi-national corporation, and they're publicly allowing this thing to exist that actually does sample from their copyrighted commercials, quite heavily at times, mutilates them and cuts them up, and they just let it go. That was the right response. It doesn't set a legal precedent, but it does set a real world precedent.

### **What's the Negativland take on filesharing and downloading?**

The next project we're going to do, called *No Business*, will come out in April or May, and is probably more the kind of thing people expect us to do. It's all about downloading and stealing music and the supposed demise of the mainstream music industry. The central track on *No Business* is called "Downloading," and it uses a speech by Michael Greene, now the former president of the Grammy Awards. He spoke at the Grammy Awards

last year and he took that occasion to admonish the youth of America about the evils of filesharing: "You are destroying the music industry." He resigned as president of the Grammys two weeks later amidst accusations of sexually harassing his staff. (laughs)



Members of Negativland pose with their attorney Hal Shalke

NEGATIVLAND

and worrying about Kazaa and Morpheus and Limewire. They aren't going to care anymore about a bunch of people that sell 2,000-10,000 copies of a record which cuts up the Beatles.

**Didn't you even have a back and forth exchange with the RIAA where they admitted there was a gray area around collage?**

Well, these days that's the

### Instant karma.

Yeah, he's a *good* man. Anyway, so we took his speech and we built the track around it. Actually what we've done is made a track that kind of sounds like Negativland is actually against downloading, that we think it's terrible, because that's what the speech is about. But the way we've supported his speech is we have interrupted him and collaged around him and layered around him all kinds of stolen music and lifted bits from all over. That just struck us as being much funnier and more interesting than making a piece saying downloading is good. Obviously *Deathsentences* is a big flop on college radio, but a lot of our other work has done really well on college radio, so I also like the idea of giving all these people at college radio stations who are pissed off at the music industry something they can put on the radio that maybe gives a little bit of voice to some of those feelings.

**I noticed I can go to your web site and download the U2 tracks or buy the CD. I was surprised that after all the hubbub about that project, it's so easily available. How is that possible?**

We just did it.

**So no one's paying attention to you anymore and the publicity's died down...**

Or they *are* paying attention to it but they are just letting it go. In the case of the U2 single, all the people involved emerged looking pretty bad. Island Records has been bought out twice since then. All the people who worked there when they sued us are gone, even the president. And U2's not even on Island Records any more. That's just all in the past. You know, we put out the *Plunderphonics* project on our Seeland label, a double CD that's totally illegal, and it got reviewed very favorably in big time music industry magazines like *Rolling Stone* and *Spin*, and they mention the fact that it's 100% made of other people's music. They even named who some of those artists were: Michael Jackson, Metallica, the Beatles, the Doors, Dolly Parton. And nothing happened. And our calculated risk strategy there – which we always have, we're not as reckless as we seem to be, we're always balancing risk versus artistic coolness – but we were thinking, you know what, the music industry attorneys out there are all completely occupied with suing Napster

problem. The problem is it's the manufacturers now where you might get really hung up. We get emails all the time from people who are doing audio collage stuff, and they're saying, "We're trying to get our CD pressed, and the RIAA is now so thoroughly intimidating the CD plants that they're now routinely turning down stuff where they hear snippets of things they think are found sound." We have a pressing plant we work with that doesn't pay attention to what we do. Ssshhh, don't tell anybody! I'm not going to tell who they are, but if someone wants to know, if you're doing any kind of audio collage and you're having problems getting your CD pressed, drop me a line. It's easy to reach me through our web site (<http://www.negativland.com>), so send me an email and I will let you know who we deal with, because every time we send somebody their way, there's no problem.

And of course none of the stuff that we send them is actually pirating anybody's work at all, anyway. As far as we are concerned, it's all fair use. We're not putting out a pirated copy of the new Britney Spears record or something. It's all audio collage. In the music world, I've been hearing a lot less about threats over collage work. That's where we had the go around with the RIAA, about their guidelines with pressing plants, and we did get them to at least acknowledge or pay lip service to the idea that there is a gray area, and not *all* reuse of someone's copyrighted material is automatically an infringement. However, CD plants are still going to err on the side of being too conservative because they're a business. They're not interested in free speech issues. I was talking to one plant that turned us down, and the woman there said, "We'd like to help you, but we just can't take the risk. You don't know what it's like. These people come in from the RIAA and it's like the Gestapo." She used that term. She said, "They scare the hell out of us. They tell us we could be liable for contributory infringement. For every CD that we make for you, we could be fined \$100,000." On a bigger front, too big to go into here, the passage of the Digital Millennium Copyright Act *has* been really bad for consumers. It's eroding fair use in terms of the consumer end of what they can do, making copies of CDs they have purchased to use in their car or at work or to share with friends... on that end it's very fucked up, and it's very much an issue to be aware of and try

to resist. What's happened to Internet radio because of CARP is a horror show.

What I think the whole entertainment industry is doing right now is grossly overstating the damage that filesharing and Internet radio might do, because what they want is the playing field all to themselves. So they think if they can get the people in Congress to believe this is the death blow to the music industry, they can get Congress to agree to whatever they want. Frank Creighton, who's the head of criminal investigations at the RIAA, has likened their efforts to stop filesharing to the war on drugs. Which I thought was a great analogy to pick, because the war on drugs is a total failure and drugs are cheaper and more pure than ever before, and now we've got the largest percentage of our population in jail of anyone on the planet. Of course in this case, I guess, if they go after everybody, it won't be a bunch of black inner city kids, it'll be a bunch of white suburban kids. But that's where most of the drug abuse in our country *really* occurs, so maybe that all nicely balances out....(laughs)

What's been so amazing about what happened with Napster is that it took these issues about who owns information and ideas, intellectual property ideas and arcane copyright issues, and propelled them onto the cover of *Time* magazine and *The New York Times*. Suddenly you had all these explanations of fair use in mainstream media. We called our book that came out in 1995 *Fair Use: The Story Of The Letter U and the Numeral 2* because we wanted to call attention to that phrase, which didn't seem to be well known at the time. But now a lot more people are aware of the notion, and what's happened lately with so-called "mash ups" and "bootlegs" really blows my mind. Just when you thought appropriation couldn't get more mainstream, it got more mainstream by leaps and bounds! Mash ups are something that's become a particularly big trend in England. It's people taking two or three tracks by different bands and playing them at the same time, and layering them to make a new track. Quite often it's taking an acappella version of something and layering it on top of something else. Quite often it's black culture overlaid on top of leaden electronic white culture. Someone actually pointed out to me something that I had not quite caught culturally, which is that in England you don't really have black urban radio. It does not exist. There might be stations that play reggae, but you don't have any of the stuff you have here, so part of the novelty of hearing Missy Elliott singing on top of Gary Numan is that there's a certain black culture thing they're not hearing in the mainstream over there. So this mash up I just mentioned, I think it's called "Freak Like Me," it's a #1 hit single. I heard it literally everywhere I went in England, and met the guy who made it at an event I was speaking at. Richard X, he's a very nice guy. He'd just come back from two weeks on a yacht off the coast of

Greece with P. Diddy, who wants to work with him on his next project!

### **So are those legal releases?**

Well, no, the interesting thing about mash ups... well, with the #1 hit single, first it was just an illegal 7" that Richard put out. It was a huge hit in clubs, and it was a big enough hit that it came to the attention of a record label who then licensed the sampled tracks as well as paid money to go into the studio to recreate the parts they couldn't get the rights to sample. Weird, huh? But what's really fun about the genre is it's almost completely illegal. It all exists as MP3 files and white label 7" singles. And actually, one of the tracks on *No Business* is being given to Richard X to remix it for release in England as an illegal white label 7". So what's interesting to me about all this is that it's enormously mainstream and popular. There's thousands of 13-year-olds all over England who are taking their PCs and iMacs and they're just dragging little sound files one on top of another to make new songs. It's very punk rock. You don't have to know how to play anything at all. Also what's interesting is that it has no political, cultural critique in it whatsoever; it's just about making some funny thing you can dance to. A couple years ago on the True/False Tour, I used a ZZ Top song played at the same time as Julie Andrews singing the theme from *The Sound of Music*, and made it work, and it was really funny.

The reason all of these arcane intellectual property issues are important is because these are all examples of ways corporations want to divvy up, own and control absolutely every square inch of not only the physical world, but also the inside of your head, which is ideas, art, and culture. I think that's the reason why I'm interested in it. It's not that I particularly care about copyright law. It's just one way Negativland got impacted by the hammers of the corporate world. But it's literally a matter of life and death when you're dealing with things like patent laws that might allow a drug company to sell an AIDS drug that costs them 50 cents to make for \$15 a pill. That's where it's really serious.

### **Many people may not realize that Negativland is the source for the term "culture jamming." How did that wind up happening and getting propagated?**

It goes back to a release we did in 1984 called *Jam Con 84* which was edited from our radio show, *Over The Edge*. We'd done a show that was all about jamming, ham radio jamming, an international jammers convention, with sound effects, music, callers... it was trying to sound like we had roving live reporters interviewing people, and we actually did get a real ham radio jammer to come up for the show. Our interest came from all our listening to ham radio jamming....we got some great recordings to use! They were always jamming each other with test tones and being obnoxious and silly, so we naturally used this stuff on our own live-mix radio show. Whenever we were

doing our radio show, and you're at home or in your car and tuning your dial, and you end up stumbling across this thing we are doing that is not like anything else on the radio, well, our show, to us, is kind of a jamming sort of a thing. Just the whole notion of jamming fit with how we saw some of our work. Jamming even goes back earlier... it appears on our album *A Big 10-8 Place*, all over it actually. There's even a little hand embossed thing on the plastic sleeve that says "A Jammer Can," and I remember sitting around with Ian, who was part of the group back then, and saying, "Wouldn't it be neat if someday people thought this whole idea of jamming and being a jammer was really cool, and that's what they wanted to do themselves? And it wouldn't be about just jamming the radio – but about jamming the media in a bigger, cultural, political sense?" And our wish eventually came true!

Anyway, somewhere in 1990 or 1991, a writer named Mark Dery was noticing some of the things that were going on in our music and he wrote a trend piece about people who were doing media that dealt with media, media that took the media and responded to it, and he ended up using our phrase. He then went on to do a nice little pamphlet called "Culture Jamming." And then *Adbusters* printed a portion of it or of some article he wrote, and that's how *Adbusters* ran across the phrase. And at some point, they decided that they really liked this "culture jamming" phrase and they wanted to brand their movement, label it, give it an identity, and market it... which is actually a lot of what they're attacking in their magazine, which I think they think is a clever thing to do. I don't agree, actually, I think that's fraught with peril. They have commodified the idea of attacking the commodification of everything. So anyway, it took on a life of its own through *Adbusters*.

Interestingly enough, and I don't really understand why, they've never written about what we do, ever. You'd think *Dispepsi* would be right up their alley, you'd think they'd be all over it. We took a huge risk doing that record, and they never wrote about it. Of course they mean well, and they have a circulation of 80,000, so clearly it resonates with a certain kind of person. That kind of person isn't me, though, or anyone in Negativland. I kind of have the feeling that the phrase "culture jamming" has become a sort of proprietary thing for them. They really feel like it's theirs. And Buy Nothing Day is the same: they didn't invent Buy Nothing Day either, but you'd never know it from the way they promote it.

One thing they say about their work is that they're beyond left and right. From what I know of *Adbusters*, you get the impression that what they're saying is if you just alter enough billboards, if you just jam enough media, if you just make enough counter-ad ads, somehow this will change the world and make everything okay. And I just think that leaves a huge part of the equation out, which is the political process. I think it's great fun

to cut up media and make stuff out of it. I think it's very empowering for the individual, it changes your relationship to mass media and mass culture when you look at it as a two way thing, when you look at it as something you can respond to and do things with. But I don't know how effective it is as an agent of change. It's definitely an *element* of it... but I think the single biggest thing that needs to happen in this country that would change everything in a kind of trickle down effect is true, real, honest to God, campaign finance reform. If you actually made our so-called democratic process *truly* democratic and politicians *really* represented the people, everything would change, including things like the quality of our media, and you wouldn't have all these mergers with fewer and fewer companies owning more and more of our music, newspapers, TV... there's so many things that would come out of it if you had people looking out for the public good, which would happen if you took out special interest money.

There's a city in Pennsylvania that just declared, "We do not recognize corporations as being persons. They are not persons, and they are not entitled to any of the rights of persons." It's amazing... I don't know what's going to happen, but it's really incredible. It came about because a corporation actually sued the city and said they had the rights of a person because the city was preventing them from doing something in the town, and I think it pissed enough people off that they passed this thing. It's a small but incredibly significant step.



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## The Past

Scientists have known for more than a century that it's possible to get information both into and out of a living brain by way of electrodes.

In 1870, two young German physicians, Gustav Fritsch and Eduard Hitzig, found that by electrically probing certain parts of an anesthetized dog's brain, they could cause the dog's limbs to move. Fritsch and Hitzig's research was considered so improbable that the University would make no room for their work, and the operation was conducted on a table in a private home in Berlin. Upon the publication of their results, however, the world took notice.

Fritsch and Hitzig's study was a landmark in two ways. First, it contradicted all previous doctrine that it was impossible to influence behavior by electrically stimulating the brain. Second, it demonstrated very clearly that some functions of the brain were localized – that certain regions controlled the motion of one limb and other regions the motion of another limb, for example.

Both of these concepts are crucial to the notion of brain-computer interfaces. The fact that we can stimulate an area of the brain to affect behavior demonstrates the basic possibility of moving information into the brain through direct neural connections. The fact that functions in the brain are localized to specific areas means that we can focus our study on those areas to determine how those functions are encoded.

Five years later, in 1875, Richard Caton placed a galvanometer on the exposed brains of monkeys and rabbits and was able to record the electrical activity of neurons firing. In so doing he demonstrated that it's possible to get information *out* of the brain via a direct neural interface as well. Over the next several decades research in the area moved steadily forward. Researchers demonstrated the ability to stimulate and record from several additional areas in both human and animal brains.

One of the largest steps forward came in the 1950s.

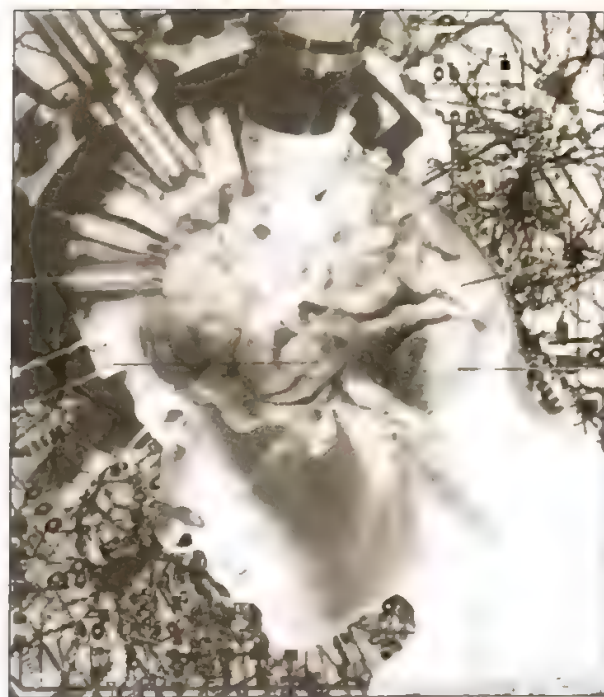
Neurosurgeon Wilder Penfield was investigating treatments for epilepsy. By stimulating different areas of the brain he hoped to find the region of the brain responsible for epileptic seizures, which he could then remove or destroy. As he stimulated various areas of the brains of his patients (who were awake at the time), Penfield catalogued their responses, thus creating the first systematic map of the brain. Most dramatically, he discovered that stimulating certain areas would cause the patient to intensely experience memories of past events. These memories were often extremely vivid, including sound, color, and motion. Furthermore, Penfield found that once he had located a spot on the brain that triggered a certain memory, stimulating that spot in the future would trigger the same memory.

In all of these studies, however, researchers were limited by the technology available to them. Throughout the history of brain stimulation and recording, electrodes could only be inserted one at a time, and even one recording electrode produced far too much data to process at once. The best researchers like Caton could do is record the electrical activity at a site for later analysis. Researchers would have to wait for the field of electronics to evolve before they could use electrodes to get deeper insights into the function of the brain.

## Fast Forward to the Present

"In twenty years using a brain implant is going to be as common as using a mousepad," one researcher tells me.

I'm at the 33<sup>rd</sup> Neural Prosthesis Workshop, at the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Maryland. Over 300 researchers have gathered here to discuss technologies to restore sight to the blind, mobility to the paralyzed, and hearing to the deaf. Located just outside Washington, D.C., the NIH's National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Strokes is an epicenter for brain-computer interface research: one of the two major U.S. funding sources for work in the field. The other funding source, the Defense



Advanced Research Projects Agency, is just ten miles away in Arlington, Virginia.

Here in Bethesda, it's standing room only as speaker after speaker takes the podium to present on latest results or future plans.

Broadly speaking, neural prostheses can be divided along two axes. The first axis is invasive vs. non-invasive. Non-invasive systems don't break the skin. EEG, for example, involves placing electrodes on the surface of the scalp to measure electrical activity from the brain within. Non-invasive systems are convenient – the patient can put a helmet on their head or sit inside a machine without any need for brain surgery or permanent implants.

Unfortunately, non-invasive systems also tend to have much lower resolution than invasive systems. Invasive systems are where most researchers at the Bethesda conference think the future lies – in principle you can get orders of magnitude more data in or out of the brain if you can connect directly to some of the 15 billion or so individual neurons. The problem is that connecting to those neurons means surgery of some sort.

Brain surgery is not something one jumps into lightly. An infection or a slip of the knife can be deadly or crippling. For that reason, most invasive neural prosthesis research to date has been on animals. The relative risk of brain surgery

## **Progress depends on applying the latest techniques in brain science, computer science, and electronics all to the same problem.**

has another important implication: the first people to get brain implants will be those most willing to submit to brain surgery, those with the least to lose and the most to gain – in other words, the severely handicapped.

The second axis is whether the goal of the neural prosthesis is to send information into the brain (by electrically stimulating neurons) or to get information out of the brain (by recording the electrical pulses of neurons). Both sorts of systems are being actively developed. Systems that send information into the brain are already in use to restore hearing in thousands of individuals and are being actively developed to restore vision. And systems that get information out of the brain can give a paralyzed individual the ability to control a computer speech program, a wheelchair, or a robot arm. There are also systems that send signals into the brain that we may not easily recognize as information – for example, brain implants that help control the tremors of Parkinson's disease or the seizures of epilepsy.

Most work on neural prosthetics today focuses on three core areas: restoring hearing to the deaf, restoring vision to the blind, and providing the paralyzed with a means to control computer interfaces or robotic devices.

### **Hear Hear**

By far the oldest and most successful research area is in restoring hearing to the deaf through neural prosthetics called cochlear implants. In the 1960s and '70s, Dr. William House implanted, as he describes them, "the first device ever approved to replace a human sense."

House was not a researcher by training. He was a physician interested in restoring hearing to some of his profoundly deaf patients, patients that could not benefit from conventional hearing aids. Normal hearing aids work by amplifying sounds that they pick up and then relaying them acoustically to the inner ear. That is to say, they turn up the volume on the outside world. For the majority of hearing loss issues, either this sort of hearing aid or minor surgery can improve hearing.

However, for the millions of people who have suffered the loss of hair cells in the inner ear that stimulate the auditory nerve, turning up the volume does not work. In these people, who suffer from *sensorineural* hearing loss, there is nothing left in the ear to pick up the sound vibrations and turn them into neural impulses.

House knew that research from the 1930s and earlier showed that properly aligned electrical stimulation of the nerves of the cochlea could produce the sensation of sound in these patients. Some of House's contemporaries had demonstrated in more detail what needed to be done, during operations in which they stimulated the cochlea of patients and could produce sounds in certain frequency ranges.

Despite this evidence for the feasibility of implants, it was at times an uphill battle to fund and conduct the research. In his monograph on the history of cochlear implants, House writes, "At the time research money was completely unavailable, apparently because of the prevailing feeling that implant research 'should not be done.'"

Another stumbling block was the inherently multidisciplinary nature of the work. House's area of expertise was in medicine. He brought an understanding of the function of the ear and its connection to the brain, the treatment of patients, and the surgical techniques that would be required to connect an implant to the ear / brain interface.

House was not, however, an electrical engineer. He had no expertise in the design or fabrication of electrodes or the control of electrical signals. In an event that foreshadows the nature of brain-computer interface research today, a breakthrough came with the involvement of Jack Urban, the engineer who would go on to build and design the actual implant. Says House, "We each brought different skills and differing outlooks to the process. My orientation was the selection of the patients and the surgical approach for implants. Jack applied his genius for electronics to the problems we faced."

We shall see this as a theme in all areas of brain-computer interface work: *Progress depends on applying the latest techniques in brain science, computer science,*

and electronics all to the same problem.

Urban also made his electronics workshop and expertise available free of charge, helping to solve House's funding problem. Together, Urban and House were able to build and implant the first cochlear implants. Interestingly, only after implantation did they start to determine the code they would use to transmit sounds as electrical signals to the cochlear nerve. With a small cadre of early patients, House and Urban experimented with various ways to encode sound as nerve impulses, until they found a very simple scheme that worked well.

In a way, this is not surprising. House and Urban's implants allowed them to collect vastly more data than any researchers before them on the exact coding of sounds in the nervous system. Without having ever tried to stimulate these nerves to produce useful sounds, how could researchers know what pattern would work best?

Indeed, this is another theme common to all areas of brain computer interfaces: *The fastest way to understand how the brain encodes a sense or function is to try to interface with that sense or function.*

In any case, House's implants worked quite well. Each implant had five electrodes, and the simplified coding scheme they used treated the five as a single electrode. The auditory nerve that the electrode stimulated, by contrast, has more than 30,000 fibers. Despite this, a very simple input signal was able to produce useful hearing.

Today, more than 40,000 patients worldwide have cochlear implants. Modern cochlear implants have up to 22 electrodes and fit entirely within the ear. Prototype systems with more electrodes and more sophisticated speech and sound processing electronics are in the works.

Cochlear implants are not perfect – no one would expect them to be with only 22 electrodes interfacing with 30,000 nerve fibers – but they are impressive in their performance nonetheless. Most patients can pick up well over 90% of two syllable words by hearing them alone, and more from context and by watching the lips of the speaker.

For those few patients who have suffered hearing loss due to damage to the auditory nerve itself, cochlear implants do not function. For those patients, however, there is ongoing research into cortical implants that would send signals directly into the auditory cortex of the brain, rather than through the auditory nerve. Initial results seem promising, though the technology is far from being commercialized.

### **Cyber Vision**

If hearing is the great success story of brain-computer interfaces today, restoration of sight is the dramatic goal of many researchers.

In September 2002, Dr. William Dobelle made a splash when his work, and a patient of his, graced the cover of *Wired*. After 30 years of research, Dobelle had succeeded in restoring vision to a blind man – not perfect vision or even good vision, but vision sufficient that Jens, the patient, could find objects on a table and could even navigate a Mustang

convertible around an office parking lot.

Dobelle's announcement and the subsequent press attention caused an uproar in the field – not because of his research, but because of how he went about it. Unlike the vast majority of brain-computer interface researchers, Dobelle is not in academia. He seldom publishes results, preferring to keep his methods as secret as possible to facilitate future patents. Most damning of all are two highly irregular steps in his research. First, Dobelle circumvented the normal medical and ethical review boards and FDA approval by having the surgery to implant his device conducted overseas. Second, unlike other trials of experimental techniques, which are typically free to patients and supported by government grants, Dobelle charges patients for the procedure, which he says costs around \$100,000.

The result has been to make other researchers working on visual prostheses extremely wary about press coverage and about overly hyping their nascent field. Phil Troyk, a researcher working on a visual prosthesis in the same general category as Dobelle's, warned me, "I urge you to not either overstate the current technology, nor raise unrealistic hopes for the future, as blindness is often a lonely and desperate condition."

Troyk's concerns are well justified. Press reports about pending technology often fail to distinguish between laboratory demonstrations and mature technology that is ready to be put to use. Neural prostheses to restore sight are at the laboratory demonstration stage now, and it will likely be a decade or more before the technology has been sufficiently refined and the safety sufficiently verified for the systems to be implanted on more than an experimental basis. Indeed, it took two decades for the much simpler cochlear implant to go from the first lab successes in the mid '60s to FDA approval in 1984.

Still, it's hard to argue with Dobelle's work and other work in the field as a *proof of principle*. What we've learned is that *it's possible to stimulate the brain in such a way as to produce useful vision*. That's a profound and important result, with major implications for the future.

In fact, researchers are working on not one, but several approaches to restoring vision. On one end of the spectrum are researchers like Dobelle, Troyk, and Dick Normann in Utah who are working on *cortical visual prostheses*. These interfaces are implants that go into or on the surface of the brain, in an area called the primary visual cortex. On the other end of the spectrum are several research groups working on *retinal prostheses*. These interfaces are analogous to cochlear implants, in that they connect to the nervous system at the border between the sense organ and the nerves that carry that sensory information to the brain proper.

A striking feature of all work in brain-computer interfaces to restore vision is just how little information is being sent into the brain by the prosthesis.

Dobelle's first generation system had 64 electrodes. He

will not say how many electrodes are involved in his current system, as it is not yet patented. The first permanent retinal prosthesis, which was implanted on February 19<sup>th</sup>, 2002 by Mark Humayun and colleagues, has only 16 electrodes. In a relatively high-bandwidth study, Harvard researcher Garret Stanley recorded from 177 neurons in the cat retina and was able to reproduce a grainy image of what the cat saw. 177 neurons is large only in comparison to the scale of other neural interfaces. By comparison to the brain, these numbers of connections are tiny: the retina has 130 million photoreceptors – the rods and cones that detect light and convert it into an electrical impulse. The optic nerve, which carries information from the retina to the brain, has over 1 million nerve fibers. The visual cortex of the brain has additional hundreds of millions of neurons devoted to visual processing.

It's amazing, then, that a mere handful of electrodes can provide enough data to create useful results, but in fact, this pattern repeats itself in every domain of brain-computer interfaces we know of today. Remember that in the cochlear implant, only 22 electrodes stimulate a nerve with over 30,000 fibers and still produce extremely high quality hearing. In areas of motor control, which we'll look at next, only handfuls of electrodes, and at times as little as a single electrode, can produce useful data to control a cursor or a robot limb. Still, most researchers believe that as we increase the number of neurons that we can stimulate and record from, we'll improve the resolution, speed, and accuracy of the interfaces.

Back in the vision laboratories, there are other design differences and concerns that divide researchers in the field.

Retinal prosthesis researchers themselves are working on two broad categories of implants: Epiretinal implants, the sort that Humayun and colleagues are testing in permanent implantations in humans, sit on the surface of the retina. Subretinal implants are buried underneath layers of nerve cells and replace the rods and cones at the very back of the retina. There are trade-offs between the two techniques. Epiretinal implants require an external camera or other video input to feed them the sensory data used to stimulate nerves. Subretinal implants, on the other hand, directly replace the rods and cones that pick up light and thus have no need of an external video source. However, current subretinal implants aren't efficient enough to rely entirely on light striking them from the outside world for their power. Thus, subretinal implants require an outside power source, much as do epiretinal implants.

A similar debate exists in the domain of cortical implants, though here the advantages of one system may be more clear cut. Dobelle has done his work to date with surface electrodes. These electrodes sit on the surface of the brain and stimulate the neurons around them. A benefit of this approach is that there is no need to penetrate the brain and potentially damage neurons. However, a disadvantage of this approach is that if it is necessary to stimulate

neurons that are not immediately on the surface of the cortex (which it seems to be), a much higher current must be used. This higher current draws more power, radiates more heat in the brain, and results in a coarse pattern of stimulation at deeper layers of the cortex, limiting the possible resolution.

Normann, Troyk, and others, by contrast, use penetrating electrode arrays. These arrays, just a few millimeters on a side, have shanks that are generally a millimeter to a few millimeters in length. The arrays are implanted by placing them on the surface of the brain and quickly "firing" them into the brain itself. While this sounds rather traumatic, the electrode shanks displace less than 1% of the brain volume that they penetrate, generally pushing neurons out of their way rather than damaging them. Penetrating electrode arrays are, in fact, the standard not just in vision but increasingly in all neural prosthesis work. The benefits are crucial. The human cortex, the last area of the brain to evolve, and the seat of most higher functions, is several millimeters thick. To stimulate or record from the vast majority of neurons in the cortex, one needs to be able to reach them by way of an electrode that penetrates the brain, rather than merely sitting on its surface. The benefits in terms of power are also clear: Surface electrodes like Dobelle's may require on average 50 milli-amps to stimulate their target neurons. Penetrating electrodes require 1/1000<sup>th</sup> of this power – 50 micro-amps – to stimulate their target neurons. As a result, these electrodes can be spaced more closely together and the risk of overheating nearby brain tissue is much smaller.

While there are things that separate the various approaches to visual prosthesis, there are also important commonalities. While the subretinal implant which replaces rods and cones acts like an artificial eye, all of the other types of visual prosthesis act more like a digital video in port. In cortical visual prostheses and epiretinal prostheses, the implant is just an interface to the nerves of the retina or the visual cortex. The implant takes video and converts it into neural signals. The expectation is that this video will come from a camera worn by the patient, and that it will be used to replace normal sight. In principle, though, the video can come from any source the patient can connect to – a computer, a virtual reality system, a remote surveillance camera, perhaps even a camera worn by a different individual.

This is another important principle of brain-computer interfaces: *By making sensory information and other brain functions digital, we make them portable and interchangeable.*

In addition, there's no reason for the video sources people with visual prostheses wear to be limited to just the capability of the human eye. Want digital zoom? Dobelle built this feature into his first visual prosthesis, for a patient named Jerry. Want infra-red or x-ray? Want a visual representation of sonar? All of these are in principle doable for a human whose vision is achieved by way of a

digital video input jack.

Of course, all of these are dependent on the external camera hardware and the hardware and software required for converting video signals into neural impulses. The story of that signal processing hardware and software is one that illustrates the convergence of computing and biology that is necessary to make neural interfaces work. Dobelle's first implant, performed more than twenty years ago, required a computer that weighed two tons and measured 7 feet by 10 feet to perform the calculations necessary to convert video into neural signals the brain can understand. The latest system, implanted in Jens in 2002, is worn over one shoulder. Moore's Law, the famous observation that the number of circuits that can be placed on a chip doubles every two years, continually increases computer performance, and has only recently brought sufficient portable computation to make neural interfaces practical.

### **Robotic Limbs**

Of course, the human mind does more than process data – it directs action. For example, healthy, uninjured humans can move the limbs of their body by thought. For some humans, paralysis induced by spinal cord injury or disease robs them of the ability to move their limbs. In the most severe of these cases, such as severe “shut in” patients who suffer from advanced ALS (the ailment Hawking suffers from), the disability is severe enough to prevent not just movement of the limbs, but also speech. There are several million quadriplegics and perhaps half a million shut in patients worldwide – a huge population that could benefit from neural prostheses to restore some of their missing capabilities.

Of all the areas of brain-computer interface research, restoring motor control to such patients is perhaps the most vigorous, most well funded, and most obvious in its ability to radically improve the lives of the severely handicapped.

As a general rule, the more severe the handicap someone suffers from, the lower the bar for a technology that reduces that handicap. So it is in this case. For a severe shut in patient, even the most primitive ability to communicate with or manipulate the outside world can bring a quantum leap in quality of life. In the last several years an impressive body of research has given hope that this will someday be possible.

Miguel Nicolelis and John Chapin are arguably the most well known and best funded researchers working in the field of brain-computer interfaces for motor control today. Public awareness of the field was sparked by their publication in '99 of a pivotal study in rats. Nicolelis and Chapin placed a rat in a cage with a lever that the rat could press to get water. The lever actually controlled a robot arm that held a cup of water outside the cage. To drink water, the rat had to use its paw to press the lever just far enough that water dripped from the cup (but didn't pour all over the rat), hold the lever there long enough to drink, and then release it.

While the rat performed this action, a set of 24 electrodes

they had placed in the rat's motor cortex – the area of the brain that controls motion – recorded the activity of 48 neurons. As in other examples we've seen, 48 neurons is a tiny, tiny proportion of the millions of neurons used in controlling motion. Nevertheless, Chapin and Nicolelis wanted to see if they could predict how far the rat pushed down the lever based upon the activity of these neurons. By comparing the activity recorded at these neurons with the movement of the lever, the researchers were able to find a pattern or code by which the movement of the lever could be predicted from just the activity of this tiny sample of neurons, and program that code into a computer.

Then came the moment of truth. In one experiment, Nicolelis and Chapin disconnected the lever and gave the computer control over the movement of the water cup. Now delivery of water to the rat would depend entirely on the activity of those 48 neurons, and not the way the rat used its paw to move the lever. Would the code work? It did. In fact, their processing of the code was a bit too rapid, and the water cup moved before the rat expected it. Not only had Chapin and Nicolelis predicted the way the rat's paw would move based on its neural activity, they had cut out the delay of sending those signals from the rat's brain to the muscles that controlled its paw!

Indeed, an even more surprising thing happened after that: in some trials, *the rat stopped pressing the lever at all* and relied solely on the neural interface to deliver the water.

This is a bit puzzling at first glance. The neurons that are being sampled are the ones that control the movement of the rat's paw – that's why they were chosen and how the code was developed. How can the rat now be activating the robot arm but not using its own paw? The answer is that brains – both rat brains and human brains – are “plastic.” The way our brains work are, to some extent, flexible. Neural connections grow stronger or weaker based on use. This is a simple answer and obscures huge unanswered questions about exactly how this happens, and why it happens in this case. It is, however, sufficient for us to make an important realization. Prior to the study, the rat had four limbs – its four paws. After the study, the rat was still able to move its four limbs, and had also gained a small degree of control over a fifth limb – the robot arm that delivered water to its cage.

Could the rat move the robot arm in one direction and its paw in another? Right now that's a complete unknown. No study has attempted such a task, whether with rats, primates, or humans. The very possibility, though, is intriguing enough that in the next few years researchers are bound to attempt it.

Nicolelis and Chapin's success in rats was just the first in a relative flood of findings in the field over the following years. Chapin and Nicolelis themselves replicated the results in owl monkeys with some important twists. First, the rat research they had done tracked only one-dimensional movement. The lever could be pressed down or up a

certain amount, but could not go side to side or in or out. Second, rats have very simple brains compared to humans – a primate such as an owl monkey is a much better model of our brain.

In the primate study, Chapin and Nicolelis used two owl monkeys, and were able to get a robot arm working for each of them. As in other studies, the number of connections was extremely small – 96 in one monkey and 32 in another. The researchers relied on the ability to simultaneously monitor both the neural activity of the monkey and the movement of the monkey's natural arm. By doing so, they were able to train an artificial neural network (a software technique inspired by the brain) to control a robot arm using the same signals. Control of the robot arm wasn't perfect, of course – the position of the arm was sometimes off by an inch or two in either direction when compared to the monkey's natural arm. Nevertheless, this was an important milestone in demonstrating that their rat results could be extended to primates.

In their primate work, Nicolelis and Chapin also added a gimmick, but a thought provoking one: In addition to controlling a robot arm directly in front of her, the neural activity of Belle, one of the owl monkeys, was transmitted to a lab at MIT, 600 miles away, using nothing more elaborate than an internet connection. At the MIT lab, another robot arm responded to Belle's neural activity and moved in synchrony with the arm at the Duke lab where Belle sat.

It's hard to call this anything other than a gimmick – anyone who understands that the signals were being sampled and fed into a computer would understand that they could be transmitted to a computer anywhere in the world. Still, it's an evocative gimmick. It reminds us that by digitizing this motor control information (or any other neural activity), we get all the benefits afforded to digital information. The neural activity can be broadcast from one location to another at the speed of light. It can be recorded for later analysis or for later "playback" via a robot arm. It can be simultaneously sent to multiple sites at once. It can potentially be compressed or encrypted or digitally signed, just like any other digital information.

Interestingly enough, Chapin and Nicolelis have also plotted the accuracy of their neural interface against the number of neurons they're recording from, and have used this to make predictions about the number of neurons they need to record from to get a truly high-accuracy three-dimensional interface. What they find is that, when a small number of neurons is being sampled, accuracy improves quickly as more neurons are added to the system. Over time, however, additional neurons contribute less and less to the performance of the system, and at a certain number of neurons performance tops out at its theoretical maximum. This number of neurons, they believe, is in the hundreds – at the very most in the thousands. Of course, this result is highly dependent on the computational techniques they use to convert the neural signals into control signals for the robot arm, as well as the task.

Nicolelis and Chapin's work has been replicated and improved upon at several labs around the world. Andrew Schwartz at ASU, a former student of Apostolos Georgopolous, the father of this field, has demonstrated the ability of a primate to feed itself using a robot arm. Indeed, Schwartz may have produced solid results prior to Nicolelis and Chapin, but did not publish them until later. Dick Normann's Center for Neural Interfaces in Utah has produced motor control results, in addition to its focus on vision, smell, and hearing. Daniella Meeker in Richard Anderson's lab at CalTech has produced impressive results showing that a different area – the posterior parietal cortex, which is involved in planning motion rather than actually moving, is also a good target for a brain-computer interface.

Some of the most impressive work has come from the lab of John Donoghue at Brown University. Donoghue and his students have implanted some 23 primates, recording for up to 1000 days on a single animal. In addition to the huge amount of data they've captured, Donoghue's team has made breakthroughs in two areas: the accuracy they can achieve with a small number of neurons, and the amount of training time required for the prosthesis to become effective.

While Nicolelis and Chapin recorded from scores of neurons, and needed substantial time to train the artificial neural network on their computers to understand and respond to the activity of these neurons, Donoghue's group can get good results from as few as 15-30 neurons and one or two minutes of training time. What makes this possible? For one thing, Donoghue's computer model bases its predictions not just on the immediate activity of a neuron, but the history of that neuron's activity over the last second or two. Given that motor cortex neurons may fire 20 or 30 times a second in a normal situation, a history of a second and a half (what Donoghue has found to be optimal) is a non trivial amount of information, which assists the computer in determining the meaning of the current activity. In addition, rather than using a computationally expensive artificial neural network, Donoghue's group used a much simpler linear addition of the activity at the neurons.

### ***Jacking In a Human***

While all of these studies of motor control in rats and monkeys are fascinating, provide great tools for research, and offer great evidence of the power of the field, there is already a much more dramatic demonstration of the technology: successful use in human beings.

Phil Kennedy is a neurologist at Emory University in Atlanta. A tall, soft-spoken southern gentleman, Kennedy is also a pioneer – the only researcher in the field of motor control to have implanted a device in humans.

In the '80s and '90s, Kennedy did a substantial amount of motor prosthesis research on primates. Kennedy took a different approach to electrodes than other researchers in the field. Rather than insert metal electrodes into the brain,

he reasoned, scientists needed to insert an electrode that the brain would *grow into*, integrating it into the surrounding neural tissue.

Kennedy set out to create such a device. His invention is an electrode in a tiny glass cone, less than a millimeter in each dimension. The cone is filled with neural growth factors – chemicals present in the brain that signal neurons to grow and send filaments towards the chemical source. Over a period of a few months after implantation of the electrode, neurons all around the electrode send projections into it, anchoring it into the brain. As a result, from a single electrode Kennedy is also able to read signals from the many different neurons that have attached themselves to it.

Kennedy produced a second innovation. A major risk of having wires passing through the skull and into the brain is infection. Any time the skin and skull and blood/brain barrier remain open, it provides a passageway for bacteria and other microbes to enter the brain. So Kennedy built his system to be wireless from day one. The electrodes are implanted inside the brain along with a small transmitter. The transmitter is extremely weak, but strong enough to send a signal through the skull to a specialized cap worn on the outside of the head. An induction coil allows the cap to send power wirelessly to the implant as well.

Kennedy's innovations allowed him to do something no other brain-computer interface researcher had ever done before. In 1996, the FDA gave him approval to implant experimental electrodes in shut in patients suffering from ALS. ALS patients are often extremely ill, suffering from multiple infections and a general loss of health and vitality. Nevertheless, one of Kennedy's patients, a 53 year old man named Johnny Ray, thrived after the surgery and survived for three and a half years with the implant before eventually succumbing to his disease.

You can hear the warmth and caring in Kennedy's voice when he talks about Johnny Ray. Kennedy and collaborators built a special computer interface that their patient could use to move a cursor around, picking letters from the alphabet and stringing together words. Johnny could, at best, reach only a few letters a minute, but this was a huge improvement over his previous, entirely shut in state. It's also a remarkable feat in a patient with only a single implanted electrode, even one that can record from multiple neurons.

Kennedy is now planning a new wave of studies and has received approval from the FDA to implant as many as eight of his electrodes in a single patient. If humans show the same pattern as monkeys, this leap from one to multiple electrodes may produce a major improvement in the performance of the interface as well.

### ***The Power of Feedback***

In many ways, Kennedy's success at producing solid results with only a single electrode is a testament to the power of feedback and the plasticity of the brain. In every brain-computer interface built to date, either the brain or

the computer (or both) has had to learn and adapt to make the interface work. In most animal BCI work, especially in the early days, this burden has fallen on the computer or the researchers. By carefully studying the pattern of neural activity and comparing it to the way the animal moved an arm, for example, researchers or their computers were able to learn the relationship between neural activity and arm movement. On the other hand, any time you allow a subject, whether a human or an animal, to watch how a cursor or robot arm moves at its command, and when you reward success, you see improvement over time in the speed and accuracy of the movement.

You can see evidence for the power of feedback in the difference between so called "open loop" and "closed loop" experiments. An open loop experiment is one where the animal receives no feedback and is unaware that a cursor or additional limb is moving based in time with its own. For example, in Nicolelis and Chapin's owl monkey studies, Belle and the other owl monkey could not see the robot arm moving in synchrony with their own arm. The burden of learning was therefore entirely on the computer system that predicted motion based on their neural activity. Not surprisingly, performance improved at the very beginning as the computer refined its models, and then topped off.

By contrast, studies by Donoghue, Kennedy, and others have closed the feedback loop, allowing the subject to see their success or failures and compensate to improve performance. In Donoghue's work, for example, the monkeys were trained to move a cursor around a screen to hit a target that appeared in a random location. By watching their own performance the monkeys learned to improve performance over time. And many of these monkeys eventually stopped moving their hands at all, and controlled the cursor by thought alone. Kennedy's human patients went through the same process using a cursor to pick letters from a computer screen. Initially Johnny Ray would think about moving his hand in order to move the cursor. Eventually, though, the cursor became a more natural extension of his body, and he no longer needed to think about his paralyzed hand. What's happening here, among other things, is that neural circuits are re-organizing themselves to optimize performance in the task. The same thing happens when you learn a new skill. The impressive thing is just how powerful the feedback is, and that it goes so far as to cut out the use of the old limb entirely.

Misha Surreya, a student of Donoghue's, lays out the power of feedback bluntly, "If you [connect to] any two or three neurons in any combination and say 'monkey figure it out' the monkey will eventually figure it [how to move a cursor] out."

### **Next issue: the future of brain-computer interfaces! How far can we go?**

*Ramez Naam is a computer scientist and entrepreneur in Seattle. He's currently working on his book More Than Human, which explores technologies with the potential to radically improve the human mind and body.*



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## ***Rational Mysticism:***

***Dispatches from the Border***

***Between Science and Spirituality***

John Horgan

Houghton Mifflin 2003

The cover of a recent *Time* magazine special issue features a crafty-looking yoga-babe sitting in padmasana alongside the headline: How Your Mind Can Heal Your Body. It's just another sign of a sea change in the mainstream representations of mind, as new psychoactives, imaging technologies, and pop spirituality recontextualize the neural dance of consciousness and flesh. The boundaries between consensus reality and altered states, it seems, are getting wavy again.

Enter John Horgan's *Rational Mysticism*, a journalistic exploration of edgy mind science that may be, because of its mainstream profile, one of the most important books on psychedelics published in years. A longtime *Scientific American* contributor, Horgan hit pay-dirt with 1996's *The End of Science*, which proclaimed the heretical idea that science was finally winding down, having nearly reached the end of its grand goal of explaining nature. Now that we have worked out the big ideas of quantum physics and relativity, molecular biology and evolution, Horgan argued, science now resembles a well-marketed mop-up operation. While certainly over-stating the main theme, Horgan nonetheless gave voice to the growing sense that science is losing its explanatory power as we hone in on the biggest questions.

Needless to say, Horgan's book pissed off the labcoat set, who loudly rejoined that huge and crucial areas of reality remain to be studied. The most important, of course, is the source of all this hullabaloo in the first place — in other words, the human mind. What is mind? How does the brain work? And what, pray tell, is the link between them? Even though cognitive science is just beginning, Horgan may still be right, because these questions — because they self-reflectively involve ourselves — are fundamentally different than studying the Burgess shale or the microwave background of the Big Bang. One outcome in the growing interest in consciousness is the return to the mechanics of altered states, which haven't received much attention since the 1960s and '70s.

With *Rational Mysticism*, Horgan has set his sights on the most exotic and mythologized altered states of all: mystical experience, which Horgan wisely leaves loosely defined. "The vision may or may not be ineffable, transient, unitive, or blissful, but it must offer some ultimate insight, however strange, paradoxical, and unlike ordinary knowledge." *Trip* readers will be pleased to know that in his quest to understand what mystical experience is and what it has to do with the brain, Horgan ends up spending nearly half the book on psychedelics. Appropriately, his fascination is rooted in his own experience: a 1981 trip on some "supercharged LSD" that Harvard's John Halpern suspects was the fabled motherfucker BZ (3-quinuclidinebenzilate). Though blissing out at points, Horgan wound up with a rather harrowing vision:



Creation — the multiplicity of the world — arises out of God's terrified confrontation with His own solitude, improbability, and potential mortality. Shunning His existential plight, God dissolves Himself into myriad selves, which compulsively seek but can never quite discover their true nature.

Throughout the book, Horgan is plagued by this question: why did creation happen in the first place, and why are it and us so fucked up? The gnostic answer he got during his trip, and which he brings up during many of his interviews, not only offers further proof that we are indeed locked inside a Phil Dick novel, but inures Horgan from the blissfully pat "all is one" visions of many mystics. At the same time, while keeping his skeptical science journalist hat on, he remains unsatisfied with simple reductionist answers to the Big Questions. Like many of us, he is trying to reconcile mystic intuitions with reason, and while his ponderings can often seem breezy and too quick, they also cut to the chase.

*Rational Mysticism* basically consists of a series of journalistic profiles of various heavy-weights who offer their different perspectives on the mystic experience. The charming and optimistic Huston Smith is balanced with suspicious deconstructionist scholars. Horgan talks to scientists like the "neurotheologists" Andrew Newberg and Michael Persinger, who believe they are honing in on the portions of the brain that give rise to religious experience. (Horgan finds Persinger and his celebrated "god machine" to be rather lame.) Horgan also visits "the weight-lifting bodhisattva" Ken Wilber, a hardcore meditator who claims to have achieved "undivided nondual consciousness" and whose door-stop books represent perhaps the most thorough and sophisticated contemporary attempt to rationally build an integral map of human knowledge that bridges science, psychology, and mysticism.

Horgan's self-proclaimed journalistic credo is "No ideas but in people." That is, he keeps a sharp eye on the dress and manner of his subjects, and is not shy about sharing his personal impressions of their apparent shortcomings and murky motivations. For example, though he was impressed with Wilber's mystical authority, he found him a somewhat heartless and arrogant person, while Terence McKenna, whose raps he found predictably sketchy, impressed him as an exceptionally warm and funny person in love with the weirdness of the world. Though you are not always sure whether to trust Horgan, I've had the occasion to meet a few folks in the book, and I found that his perceptions largely accorded with my own.

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Perhaps the most fascinating chapter profiles Susan Blackmore, whose book *The Meme Machine* argues that free will and the self are just illusions woven by interlocking memes parasiting our brains. Though an arch-skeptic about paranormal matters, Blackmore turns out to have undergone the sorts of out-of-body astral trips that would make New Age shamans out of most of us. She began her career attempting to prove the existence of ESP and other weird phenomenon, but became disillusioned with the psi scene and now preaches a withering reductionism worthy of Richard Dawkins. Still, she practices Zen, and maintains a spiritual view of the world. For Blackmore, genuine mystical experience means awakening from the meme dream, an experience of radical deconditioning that results in a state, simultaneously, of "total aloneness and complete oneness."

Throughout *Rational Mysticism*, Horgan wants to show how different people navigate the ambiguous zone between reason and mysticism — or whatever you want to call it — that many of us find ourselves shuttling around these days. This dance between the spirit and the nervous system inevitably leads Horgan to the topic of psychedelics, which takes up the second half of the book. Much of this material will be familiar to *Trip* readers, though Horgan provides illuminating personal takes on characters like Christian Ratsch, Franz Vollenweider, Stan Grof, Rick Strassman, the Shulgins, and McKenna.

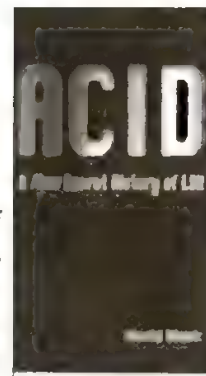
McKenna's untimely death brings Horgan back to his meditations on suffering and evil, questions he brings to the Marin County ayahuasca trip that, somewhat predictably, closes the book. It's a boring trip report, but it does lead Horgan to suggest some links between science and mysticism that, thankfully, do not become yet another stir fry of Hindu metaphysics and quantum mechanics. For Horgan, both science and mystic experience affirm the absurd miracle of existence, the incredibly improbable gift of ordinary life, even in a world of death, anxiety, and spam. The most profound questions are often the simplest. One of the most profound things I ever heard came from my grandfather, Jake Powell, a hard-drinking rascal who never graduated high school and didn't give a fig for philosophy or religion: "Why is there something rather than nothing?" Science will never answer that question, and mystical insight won't either. But both modes of exploration can deepen our intimacy with the starry vastness of that query. — **Erik Davis**

## ACID:

### *A New Secret History of LSD*

David Black

Vision Paperbacks, 2001



David Black's *ACID: A New Secret History of LSD* is another addition to the ranks of titles that attempt to recount the basics of modern psychedelic history. Much like Martin Lee and Bruce Shlain's *Acid Dreams*, Black's book looks at the role that global intelligence services played in directing the scientific exploration and eventual illicit distribution of good old LSD-25. It tries to distinguish itself from the other books on the subject by focusing primarily on two things. One is the influence that the psychedelic movement and 1960s and '70s radical politics had on each other, an area also well-covered by Lee and Shlain as far as America is concerned, but Black adds a European perspective absent from *Acid Dreams*. The other is the enigmatic Ronald Hadley Stark (nee Ronald Shitsky), a shadowy figure who many say was central to the establishment of international underground LSD distribution networks, supposedly played a key role in organizing the Brotherhood of Eternal Love and Operation Julie acid production teams, and may have been a Western intelligence asset.

Black offers a lot of interesting speculation and fascinating anecdotes over the course of the book's 208 pages, and improves somewhat on Tendler and May's earlier *The Brotherhood of Eternal Love* by at least including a few footnotes. Although his political speculations seem fairly well researched, many of his psychedelic references are unfortunately secondary and tertiary sources. For example, when I queried Brotherhood chemist Tim Scully while researching this review, I was shocked to find out that Black apparently never contacted him while working on the book. Given that it only took me about five minutes to track down Scully's contact information, I can't help but doubt the thoroughness of Black's research into the psychedelic side of his subject matter.

Conspiracy buffs and those with an interest in radical politics of the past few decades will likely find *ACID: A New Secret History of LSD* an interesting read. However, serious students of psychedelic history are urged to keep one thing in mind. The events covered in this book are shrouded in the fog of so many cover stories from players on all sides that trying to separate truth and fiction quickly becomes an incredibly frustrating exercise. Many of the participants whom I have been in contact with have alluded to the fact that most of the currently available titles on the subject are riddled with inaccuracies and errors. Hopefully as a result of the recent death of ex-CIA director Richard Helms (head of the agency during the MK-Ultra project), more of the real truth of the matter will come out in the not-so-distant future. As it stands at present, though, if you truly want to know the real story of the early days of LSD, looking in a book probably isn't going to help all that much. — **Erik Lazier**

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## ***Zig Zag Zen:*** ***Buddhism and Psychedelics***

Edited by Allan Hunt Badiner & Alex Grey  
Chronicle Books, 2002

*Zig Zag Zen* explores the intricate relationship between Buddhism and psychedelics in the West. There are several ways to approach a book like *Zig Zag Zen*, because books affect people for different reasons at different points in their lives. There was a time when I would have read this book as a metaprogrammer, experimenting with psychedelics and their effects. Now, I am most certainly more a part of the other intended audience: those who are primarily Buddhist who also have some experience with or interest in psychedelics. But a book such as this one can also be reviewed from a third perspective: a pivotal coming-together of elements, which has the ability to spark new points of view and synergies that would not have come about had either topic been explored in isolation.

It is this third view of *Zig Zag Zen* that interests me the most. Factual data on psychedelic experiences is something that I have long since left far behind, and indeed, even when I was into such details, I often found them to abstract me away from my experience much as throwing words at the meditative practice can sometimes separate one from its most immediate effects. Depth of study in either the realm of psychedelics or Buddhism is, likewise, not what *Zig Zag Zen* is about. It is definitely a sampler, but for those with open eyes, *Zig Zag Zen* has the capacity to be extremely influential, and to perhaps be encountered as a pivotal work, in a pivotal time. This is, admittedly, an instinctive argument: many people are led towards psychedelics or towards Buddhism during times when they have opened themselves up to other possibilities. So, it is also possible for the seasoned psychedelic enthusiast, or the practicing Buddhist, to use this book to jumpstart their explorations into the other area.

It is worth asking why should psychedelics and Buddhism be considered together at all. Indeed, the forward to the book, by respected Buddhist author Stephen Batchelor (*Buddhism Without Beliefs*), addresses this question. He points out that, for whatever combination of reasons, Buddhists in the West have often arisen from the ranks of psychedelic explorers, and that therefore, understanding this connection is key to understanding the prospects of Buddhism in the West. That this connection is so often overlooked is to the detriment of those who would study Western Buddhism without the insights that an understanding of this crossroads can bring.

In "The Paisley Gate," *Zig Zag Zen* perhaps finds its perfect fulcrum and balancing point. Erik Davis makes an extremely astute observation and states a pivotal thesis: that Buddhism must approach psychedelics in the West much as the indigenous spirit/nature-religion of Bon was approached by Buddhism as it entered Tibet, an inherent element of the environment that would have to be integrated, rather than shoved aside, for Buddhism to truly take hold and find its full potency. This analogy is doubly apt considering the extent to which psychedelic experience calls upon indigenous, shamanic, and nature-spirit



currents for its roots and methods. However, the West also represents an opportunity for that raw primal shamanic energy as well, one which perhaps was not available to Bon

practitioners in Tibet: the possible positive repercussions of a true fusion with Buddhism (and not simply a surrender to its methods) are immense, and should be of extreme interest to anyone concerned about the fate of the Western world (and the world as a whole). If the middle-ground between inherent compassion and ecstatic exploration can be found and forged, practitioners and world alike could benefit tremendously. In this aspect alone, *Zig Zag Zen* has the potential to become as pivotal a book for its time and place as *Be Here Now* was for its.

*Zig Zag Zen* will appeal to a broad audience of Buddhists and psychedelic experimenters, and none should expect that every essay will prove equally compelling to them. For instance, I had left psychedelics to one side for so long that it took me a fair bit of effort to digest and truly enjoy the earlier essays which concentrate on the psychedelic side of the connection. (See, notably, "High History of Buddhism in America," third essay in the book). However, once I found those essays which spoke to me most directly, I was more easily able to find inroads into the others. So, *Zig Zag Zen* should be approached with a sense of exploration, and one should not be afraid to skip around liberally while getting one's bearings. This advice relates also to my suggestion that *Zig Zag Zen* is in its best capacity as a crossroads and a fecund coming-together of themes, as a catalyst and springboard for further exploration of either Buddhism or psychedelics, depending on where you are coming from.

For me, then, many of the most interesting essays were in the later half of the book, which gives as much emphasis to Buddhism as the first half does to psychedelics. Of these, I found particularly illuminating the discussion with the late Terence McKenna, wherein he expresses his sincere surprise at the extent to which Buddhism has explored realms he had decided were solely the realm of psychedelia. An understanding of the blind spot approached in this essay seems crucial to a true understanding of the bigger issue: "The puzzle to me is how Buddhism achieves all of this without psychedelics; not only how but why, since these dimensions of experience seem fairly easily accessed, given hallucinogenic substances and plants, and excruciatingly rare and unusual by any other means."

Herein lies, I think, the key. It would seem possible that Buddhists have in many cases different goals, and so their motivations may seem more opaque to those who approach the experience of openness to the flotsam and jetsam of the mind/world with more of the eye of the neutral explorer.

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In *Zig Zag Zen*'s final discussion, perhaps the most illuminating of all as it brings together three individuals representing three fairly different approaches to the issue, Robert Aitken notes (as a Buddhist) that "we seek understanding, not ecstasy." While there seems nothing inherently wrong with ecstasy as a mindstate, many of the book's later, Buddhist authors point out the pitfalls inherent in any quick path to ecstasy, or to extreme psychic experience. In "On The Front Lines," Michelle McDonald-Smith warns of "a deep level of attachment in the mind, where if one is needing to repeat an experience, it is reinforcing [...] attachment [to that experience]. When a person feels that they need drugs to deepen their spiritual journey they're just reinforcing the attachment to those particular states of consciousness."

The crux of the question seems to be what is done with the openness which results from extreme spiritual/mindbody experience. Is it used to open up further to the world, and thereby sense its sufferings and seek to soothe them, or does it simply allow one to fold in on one's self, descending into deeper and deeper layers of technical juggling? The Buddhist who is hung up on the minutiae of interpretations of the dharma is no less at risk than the psychedelic explorer whose main concern has become the cataloging of sets and settings, dosages and details. The middle path seems to avoid these diversions form genuine openness, and steer one back towards remaining exposed and tender towards the world.

One of the most intriguing concepts set forth by the late Chogyam Trungpa was that compassion was an all-but-inevitable byproduct of openness. If one is truly open and exposed to their environment, to the extent that they can see clearly that their Me does not end with their own skin, then compassion towards an ailing world becomes a natural response. Certainly psychedelics open one up to SOMETHING. I cannot say whether or not my own experiences with psychedelics, and the openness or exposure they create, led me towards greater compassion. I can, however, say that my experiences with psychedelics DID lead me towards Buddhism, and that through Buddhism, my compassion towards the world and sense of responsibility to the world has indeed increased. For that I owe my psychedelic experiences a debt of gratitude.

Whichever direction you are coming from or going, *Zig Zag Zen* can serve as a pivotal roadmap and compass, and more importantly, can introduce you to ideas and connections you had forgotten, or had not yet discovered. But it can be hesitantly offered that all roads through psychedelics ultimately lead to openness in one form or another, and that all roads through openness ultimately lead to Buddhism in one form or another. Perhaps Buddhism leads back to psychedelics, and perhaps not. Either way, both will benefit from the dialogue represented so well in this volume. — *free agent .rez*

## **Entheos:**

### ***The Journal of Psychedelic Spirituality***

Edited by Mark Hoffman



*Entheos (the Journal of Psychedelic Spirituality)* is a biannual publication edited by Mark Hoffman. Its executive committee and advisory board is hefty with big names of psychedelia — Carl A.P. Ruck, Blaise Staples, Clark Heinrich, José Alfredo González Celdrán, Jay Fikes, Robert Forte, Kelly Ivors, Mark Kasprow, Stanley Krippner, Thomas Lyttle, Dale Pendell, Daniel Perrine, K. Trout, Peter Webster, and Michael Winkelman. Each issue of 90 pages is published "on demand" in small print-runs on an HP Laserjet 4550, in order to allow for numerous full-color images throughout. (Printed in this manner, one has to see the production of this journal as a labor of love!)

The most recent "Soma" issue of *Entheos* (Vol. 2, No. 1) kicks off with an incredible tale of "The Mushroom Gods of Ancient India," wherein researcher Clark Heinrich has drawn numerous correspondences between ancient mythological tales and *Amanita muscaria*. Heinrich is following in R. Gordon Wasson's footsteps, but has taken the supposition that the soma of India was this mushroom even further, and he provides the first hard photographic evidence ever published — an image of a sculptural relief of the gods Rama and Hanuman each holding a mushroom in their hands, while touching a larger linga situated between them that could only represent a speckle-capped fly agaric. It is worth picking up a copy of this issue of *Entheos* for this photo alone.

Alas, the second article, "The Entheogenic Eucharist of Mithras" by Mark Hoffman, Carl A.P. Ruck, and Blaise D. Staples, doesn't fare as well. The piece presents a hodgepodge of speculations related to the idea that the Mithraic mystery religion was also based on *Amanita muscaria* consumption. Central to the rites of this cult was a bull sacrifice and feast, which the paper's authors contend was actually symbolic of entheogenic sacrament consumption. But there seems to be a lot more bull in this interpretation than there was on the Mithraic banquet table. The article is choppy and the linguistic "evidence" unconvincing. The authors seems to see any spiritual meal as representing, by definition, a psychoactive sacrament. I'd argue that the basis for many such meals is in actuality food not drug; that which sustains life has a place of great importance in countless religious traditions (the spiritual importance of corn to Native Americans, saying grace over one's dinner, thanking the spirit of the animal killed for meat, etc.). The authors make the absurd argument that the Mithraeums (the chambers where the ritual feast took place) are too small to butcher a bull in, implying this evidences that the meal must have been something less "menacing and dangerous," which would fit

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in a smaller space. Although they mention the obvious solution in a footnote (that a bull could be ritually slaughtered outside the chamber, with the meat brought in to eat after it was slain), they dismiss this idea due to the large quantity of meat that a bull would produce and the fact that these meetings were for small groups of people. (I seriously doubt that it would have been difficult to disperse any extra meat that wasn't used in the ritual feast.) In another bit of evidence, the white stars on a red cape and the clothing traditionally depicted on the bull-slayer Mithras (whom the cult was named after) are interpreted to represent the cap of *A. muscaria*. However, the same white stars depicted on Mithras' blue cape (shown on the cover of this issue of *Entheos*) are completely ignored.

Randomly inserted into this article is a side-bar on menhirs (upright standing stones found throughout Europe, which frequently appear to depict mushrooms), which has precious little to do with the topic at hand, excepting for a weak phonetic connection between "menhir" and a few alternate names for Mithras. Of equally odd inclusion is an "interlude" composed of a letter by R. Gordon Wasson, relating his thoughts about fire, mushrooms, and sexual procreation. Although there are a few interesting interpretations in this article, many of them seem to be quite a stretch. It is possible that the argument gets stronger as the article progresses. I have to admit that try as I might, I couldn't finish reading it, as the tedious patchwork of data and length of the article literally put me to sleep twice. Nevertheless, I did enjoy the bounty of photographs presented along with the piece, which is one of the strong points of *Entheos* in general.

"Psychointegration: The Psychophysiological Effects of Entheogens" by Michael Winkelman discusses various words for visionary plants and drugs — hallucinogenic, psychomimetic (sic), psychedelic, holotropic, entheogen — describing the pros and cons for each. As this same topic has been presented by numerous authors in many other written works, with each author usually arguing for some particular term he or she likes best, it was a bit of a retread. Winkelman, of course, is championing his own term — psychointegrator. He states that such plants and drugs "stimulate the integration of the brain's behavioral and social-emotional processing output with language based ratiomentionation, egoic representations, and personal identity. This activation is reflected in the theta wave linkages between the limbic-emotional and the behavioral brain that send ascending impulses into the frontal cortex. These biochemically based physiological effects may produce awareness of repressed memories, integration of emotional and rational processes, and the resolution of conflicts through integration of various functional systems of the brain. I have introduced the term psychointegrator in order to refer to the systemic integrative effects of these substances." Aside from adding yet another term (one that I

suspect is unlikely to catch on) into the fray, I suggest that Winkelman's "psychointegrator" isn't even terribly accurate; in many cases the consumption of these sort of plants and drugs produce a disintegration: confusion, paranoia, depression, panic, and all manner of upsetting psychological states. While they very well can create an awareness of repressed memories and conflicts, they certainly don't automatically allow these to be resolved or leave the tripper in a more integrated frame of mind. Hey Winkelman, ever hear of a bad trip? Rather than being a neutral scientific term, psychointegrator is just another politically-charged word that attempts to paint the effects of these plants and drugs as largely if not wholly beneficial.

"Two Paintings by J.M.W. Turner: An Entheobotanical Interpretation" by Vincent Wattiaux is a refreshing departure from the earlier articles' attempts to pin down specific hidden meanings via linguistics, archeological evidence, and mythology. Wattiaux relies on a semiotic interpretation that leaves aside speculative (or known) intentions of the artist and speaks to archetypal meaning. However, by this time in reading *Entheos*, I started to get tired of the focus that somehow an *Amanita muscaria* depicted in art must somehow represent hidden drug use. Sometimes, a mushroom is just a mushroom, after all. Particularly the fly agaric — which has a history of non-entheogenic folk use as an insecticide, which grows all over the world, and which is one of the most recognizable fungi — is no doubt depicted in some art simply because of it acting as the symbol for a mushroom. But I suppose that this "any mushroom is a drug" attitude is what I should have expected from a journal with a theme of soma that has a "strong Wassonian" slant toward academic questions."

Past themes of *Entheos* issues have focused on "Entheogens in the Americas" and "Entheogens and the Judeo-Christian Mysteries." Both of these issues had much of the same sort of theoretical writing, with a basis in linguistics, archeology, and art. However, they also both had lighter pieces — such as an enjoyable interview by editor Mark Hoffman of his mother, who related her remembrances of the Glückspilz (happiness mushroom) while she was growing up in Germany, a first-person tale of hanging out with R. Gordon Wasson by Blaise D. Staples, an interview with Rick Strassman by Thomas Lyttle (all in issue No. 1), and an article on "Faith, Belief, and the Peyote Crisis" by K. Trout and Mark Hoffman (in issue No. 2). The current issue of *Entheos* focused too heavily on speculations about the past; I am hopeful that future issues will return to the better balance that they had in their first two issues — with material of interest to both serious scholars of ancient entheogenic religions and material for those with a general interest in the topic. As well, since *Entheos* calls itself the "Journal of Psychedelic Spirituality," I am also hopeful that future issues will spend less time pondering ancient history and more time talking about known

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traditional and modern entheogenic explorations. With only three issues out to date, I expect that *Entheos* is still looking for its groove. And even though I can't say that I always finish all of the articles in each issue, I definitely enjoy checking out the great full-color images; perhaps in that way, *Entheos* is the *Playboy* of psychedelic geeks.

—Jon Hanna

A one-year (two issue) subscription is \$28.00 from Entheomedia, #9 Camino Alto, HC71 Box 34, Taos, NM 87517. Or check them out on the web at <http://www.entheomedia.com>.

## Hallucinogens:

### A Reader

Edited by Charles S. Grob, M.D.  
Tarcher Putnam



I was introduced to psychedelics well into graduate school in chemistry and sometime after I had already formed my present spiritual view, so it came as quite a relief to find that these substances were so well able to help me bridge the gap between the science that I'd been trained in, and my spiritual views which often resisted any experimental treatment. *Hallucinogens: A Reader*, a new anthology edited by Charles S. Grob, M.D., in places considers that view. But it also looks at psychedelics in society, how we as a society view drugs, alternating between information that would be useful for a novice tripper, arguments that more experienced trippers might use to convince their parents that drugs really have some benefits, and scientific discussions on the utility of drugs. Featured authors include Andrew Weil, Terence McKenna, Huston Smith, Albert Hofmann, Ralph Metzner, and others.

In the introduction to this book, Grob briefly describes Timothy Leary's very public relationship with drugs and the way in which that relationship in part, he asserts, brought about, or at least hastened the war on drugs. He also describes Aldous Huxley's more quiet approach to the use of psychedelics as a tool to transform society as well as the visit that Huxley paid to Leary in an attempt to convince him to work more quietly with these substances. Grob uses these two men as an analogy for ways in which drugs are used in our society; he discusses the use of drugs in religious settings or for psychological purposes on the one hand, and the abuse of drugs by "immature individuals" on the other. The message he then tries to drive home is that by making

our society more accepting of drugs, we can obtain the many spiritual and medical benefits they have to offer as well as being more able to confront the problem of abuse.

"Using Psychedelics Wisely" by Myron Stolaroff should be required reading for first time trippers. It is, in ten short pages, a distilled version of everything I wish I had known before the first time I placed blotter on my tongue. He defines set and setting and gives advice on how to make the best of those. His suggestion of a sitter or guide as a key element of a good set and setting may strike one as obvious unless, perhaps, your youth was spent without one, eating drugs playing in traffic, cutting your hair, and calling your mom collect. Perhaps less obvious is his discussion on the motivation to seek knowledge and to continue to focus one's goals for self improvement, and to share this growth with others, in order to have the most rewarding experience.

Rick Strassman's essay "Sitting for Sessions: Dharma & DMT Research" is a fascinating look at the blending of scientific study—the intravenous administration of DMT in a hospital setting—with the Buddhist belief-system of Dr. Strassman and some of his study volunteers. In this vein, he delves into the issue of the similarities between psychedelic and mystical experiences. He briefly looks at the old idea that the soul is somehow connected to the body by way of the pineal gland, postulating that "the wisdom of the psychedelic experience, without the accompanying and necessary love and compassion cultivated in daily practice, may otherwise be frittered away in an excess of narcissism and self-indulgence."

Jeremy Narby discusses the trip that three molecular biologists took to the Peruvian Amazon in an attempt to use ayahuasca to help answer scientific questions that were on their minds. One American biologist working on the human genome had found a particular, structurally unique DNA sequence to be present in nearly sixty percent of all human genes. After ingesting the ayahuasca she found herself flying over these DNA structures and viewing them as if she were a protein. She realized in this vision that these structures acted as "landing pads" for transcriptional proteins. This idea had not occurred to her before and she knew now that she could verify this vision in her genomic research. I suspect that just about everyone who has ingested hallucinogenic substances a few times has tried to use it to answer questions with various success. This essay is most interesting in that it presents a very clear, and scientifically verifiably example; however, it disappoints in that the author fails to provide us with any follow up on the scientific verification of the question.

This book is filled with some very good essays which resonate strongly with me (as well as a few which fail to resonate with me) and is in part an enjoyable read. It suffers from the problem which I think many books on so broad a topic as hallucinogens suffer: lack of focus. One theme

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that can be extracted from this text is that hallucinogens when treated with respect and care have a great deal to offer to society. Perhaps another is that science, religion, and spirituality are not mutually exclusive and can, in fact, inform one another, especially with the use of psychedelics as catalysts. — **Mason Bryant**

## **Pause & Effect:** **The Art of Interactive** **Narrative**

Mark Stephen Meadows  
New York: Princeton University Press, 2005



The impressive scope of Mark Stephen Meadows' *Pause & Effect* reflects the complexity and richness of the emerging artform of interactive narrative. Innovations from the long history of Western storytelling, painting, comics, sculpture, architecture, and music ground his treatment of interactive design and present a view that is almost too much to resist. Experimentation with perspective in narrative, time, and space structures has progressed for centuries, in a multitude of media, providing fertile soil for synthesis and hybridization using both high and low tech. Meadows is interested in providing both an appreciation of this legacy as a store of insight, and a way forward into coherent, interactive, and engaging "reading" experiences.

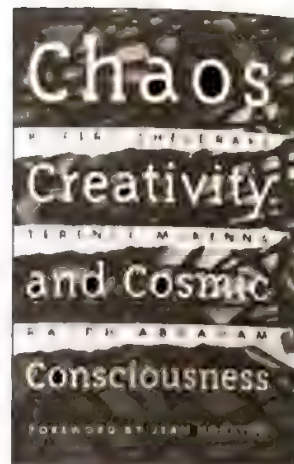
Meadows' skilled eye sheds light on the lessons that painting might offer writing, or architecture to interface design, along with any other hybrid. He shows with brilliance how the newer medium of digital art also breathes new life into its forebears in comic art, painting, literature, and performance.

A picture emerges that serves as a way to imagine the balance between narrative constraints and freedom. The relationship of author and reader, painter and viewer, performer and audience changes. In game play, audiences might prefer a whole range of interaction with the environment, a story, and other players or characters. The task of writer evolves into world-builder as the reader is empowered to affect the storyline. As interaction increases, the authority of a world comes through players' connection to the experience. In the worlds gaining most player investment, the player is empowered as a world-builder.

Just as a good novel is different with every fresh read, a viewer connects to a painting and a world emerges. The world-view and perspective of artist and another mesh and change each other with every experience. Meadows helps us envision a rich experimentation with world-view, among countless artists of a new stripe. It's a good step towards creating a more beautiful reality. — **Michael Paul Gomez**

## **Chaos, Creativity And** **Cosmic Consciousness**

Rupert Sheldrake, Terence  
McKenna, Ralph Abraham  
Foreword by Jean Houston  
Park Street Press, 2001



What happens when chaos theorist Ralph Abraham, morphogenetic field theorist Rupert Sheldrake andentheoprovocateur Terence McKenna get together to talk shop? A surprisingly lucid triologue of crosspollinating far-flung speculation on the nature of reality, consciousness, the imagination and human destiny.

*Chaos, Creativity and Cosmic Consciousness* (earlier published as *Dialogues at the Edge of the West*) is edited from transcripts of a series of workshops held at Esalen in 1989 and 1990. The trio expound on pet theories — riffing off each other, sometimes sharpening a theory or leading it into new tangents. Jean Huston in her foreword states, "The rapidity with which ideas are here offered, plumbed, and then rewoven into new tapestries of the spirit — serves as witness to the acceleration of the psyche in our times." Remarkably, not much of the material seems dated after a decade of bottle aging. Most of the conversations have a quality of active, cork-popping speculation that makes even the murkier or flakier meanderings enjoyable reading. Talks delve into intimations on the nature of imagination (and the imagination of Nature), expositions on morphic resonance, and vintage Terence classics like novelty theory, eschatology and the role of psilocybin mushrooms in human consciousness.

The book does an excellent job of introducing each of the chapters (titles like "Chaos and the Imagination," "Entities," "The Resacralization of the World") with appetizing pull quotes from each of the trio. The range of terms in the glossary alone is liable to cast a spell on you. Those already familiar with this territory should find some interesting and amusing refinements of familiar hypotheses, while others will enjoy a ride that may pique their curiosity for further fringe exploration. — **Tonx**

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# REVIEWS • REVIEWS • REVIEWS

## ***Harm Reduction Psychotherapy: A New Treatment for Drug and Alcohol Problems***

Edited by Andrew Tatarsky

Aronson, 2002

Groundbreaking is not exactly accurate, but never the less it's an appropriate term to introduce *Harm Reduction Psychotherapy*, edited by Andrew Tatarsky. In the introduction, Tatarsky directly and simply explains that the principles of harm reduction are completely aligned with those of psychotherapy. Despite its current popularity, the obsessive focus on abstinence as the only acceptable goal of, and prerequisite for, therapy for drug users is out of line with the rest of psychotherapy.

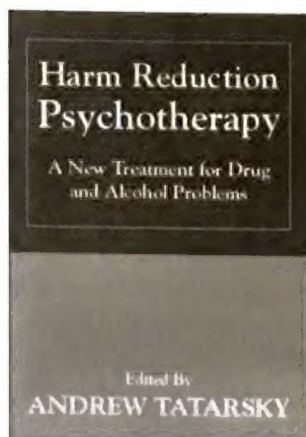
Tatarsky does not deny abstinence as one possible and sometimes desirable outcome for therapy — he even states (providing case studies of his own as well as contributing authors for backup) that using harm reduction as an approach in therapy can lead to successful abstinence, if that is what the patient really wants or needs. Tatarsky deftly manages to apologize for the psychotherapy industry's emphasis on abstinence without tainting his voice with an apologetic tone.

Because this book's goal is more or less to point out the obvious, Tatarsky spends little time on detailed theory, emphasizing instead the case studies presented by the contributing authors, adding his own comments at the end of each case. The case studies in this book are all fascinating in their own right. Those interested in reading stories that paint detailed mindscapes could skip all the psychobabble and still find this book a valuable read. Fortunately for therapist readers (and future patients), what little space is dedicated to theory is packed with powerful and valuable memes that I hope will change the face and soul of "alcohol and drug treatment services."

Central to Tatarsky's critique of current psychotherapeutic approaches to drug users is the blunt fact that most treatment for drug users focuses only on immediate and permanent abstinence from drugs and this treatment is rarely effective — he quotes various studies demonstrating success rates between 15 and 25 percent. Forced treatment and "interventions" obviously have an even more miserable success rate than voluntarily-entered services.

Tatarsky sums up the horrific catch-22 many drug users face when seeking psychotherapy in the following couple of sentences: "Substance users seeking help for issues other than substance use are routinely denied psychotherapy and referred to substance abuse treatment, while substance users unwilling or unable to accept abstinence are denied substance abuse treatment. People who want to address other issues before they address their substance use are generally said to be denying their 'disease.'"

According to *Harm Reduction Psychotherapy*, the abstinence-only model and its poor track record is due (in part) to a mistaken belief that while using drugs, a person's rational capacities and self-discipline somehow disappear completely, making therapy and personal growth impossible until the person stops using altogether. Behind this silly fallacy is the notion that "drug addiction" is an unfathomable and



incurable disease that can only be "treated" by strict avoidance of all behaviour deemed symptomatic of the disease. This book suggests instead that any given individual's drug use, problematic or not, is meaningful to them and that a competent therapist can help

uncover the complex meanings behind a person's choices regarding drug use, then help create tools that the person can use to avoid using drugs in the ways that cause trouble for them. Tatarsky admits that using drugs — even drug addiction — can be beneficial, at least as a coping mechanism, and goes as far as charging his peers with irresponsibly harming their patients by removing coping mechanisms before discovering their purpose and assisting in the development of alternative coping tools.

Tatarsky states repeatedly that harm reduction psychotherapy differs substantially for each patient and only requires that the therapist and patient build a strong, trusting, relationship, the goals for therapy be set by the patient, and the therapist suspend any judgment about the patient's choices regarding drug use. That a book needed to be written spelling this out for therapists is a sad testament to the deep lack of common sense afflicting some otherwise intelligent people.

Unfortunately "coping mechanism" is the only specific benefit Tatarsky mentions, and he usually brings this up to discuss situations in which drug use was a once-relevant coping mechanism that has become another difficulty to cope with. However, I think this book is more radically liberating and drug-positive than much literature supporting drug use as an aid to psychotherapy because Tatarsky leaves final authority over choosing what drug(s) will be used, when, how, why, and in what dose to the individual using, without dignifying any specific drugs, sets, and settings above others. On the other hand, a psychotherapist giving drugs to a patient and a psychotherapist accepting a patient's personal choices about drugs are very different beasts, and the former most certainly needs to be put forward in more conservative clothing than the latter. I hope that the continued growth and acceptance of both harm reduction psychotherapy and psychedelic therapy open the door for psychology as a whole to cast off anti-drug hysteria (OK: anti-fun-drug hysteria) and finally undertake a real investigation into the variety of internal experiences and significance of drug use. I further hope such investigations place the subjective experience of drug users at least on par with the "objective" investigation of drug-ridden lab rats, anonymous surveys, and brain scan volunteers as a source for understanding the mysteries, pitfalls, and benefits to humanity's unending search for a good high. — **Theo Rosenfeld, Pala Community Development**

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## Employee Self-Evaluation, page 3

### 15. WHAT HAVE YOUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS BEEN, BASED ON YOUR GOALS?

- ① I have made substantial progress towards learning how to fly. At this point I can make tremendous leaps, especially vertically, allowing me to get to my fourth-floor office directly from the parking lot instead of wasting valuable time with elevators or stairs.
- ② I have replaced four-fifths of the team with software at this point, including our manager. This has resulted in a 62% reduction of expense with only a 56% reduction in group usefulness.
- ③ I have constructed a predictive model that allows us to know what the next half-dozen "fires" are which will come up, requiring everyone to put off whatever real work they are doing so we can all run around and generate reports for VPs who think they want the information but who mostly just want to feel like they didn't hire a bunch of people who do nothing whatsoever to actually advance the product. Um. So anyway, I made a thing to predict when that's going to happen.

### 16. WHAT ADDITIONAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS HAVE YOU ACHIEVED?

- ① By mastering the ability to shit gold instead of excrement, I have been able to significantly subsidize our group's budget, saving the company many thousands of dollars.
- ② The graffiti I have been spray-painting on walls all around the campus seems to be significantly contributing to higher morale for all.

### 17. GOALS FOR NEXT YEAR

- ① Replace myself with software.
- ② Build and train a ruthless militia within the company — a secret society of sorts, whose principles and goals will be known only to me. Armed with flamethrowers and the Pure Love of Good Software, they will live and die by my word, and I will be revered as a God.

### 18. OVERALL, HOW WOULD YOU RATE YOUR PERFORMANCE?

I am the glue that binds the book. I am the wind that blows the leaves. I am the rock over which the ants scurry. I am the Lion King, surveying the savannah while my pride takes care of business. I am the ragtop on your convertible and the grill on your barbecue. I am the sandworm among Fremmen. I am that part of your brain that does nothing whatsoever, without which you would nonetheless die in short order, and if I don't get a healthy raise as usual, I will roll this building up like a straw and use it to snort your ashes.

— The Elder Dan

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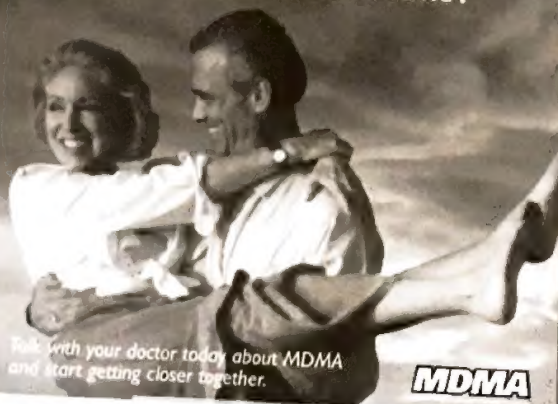
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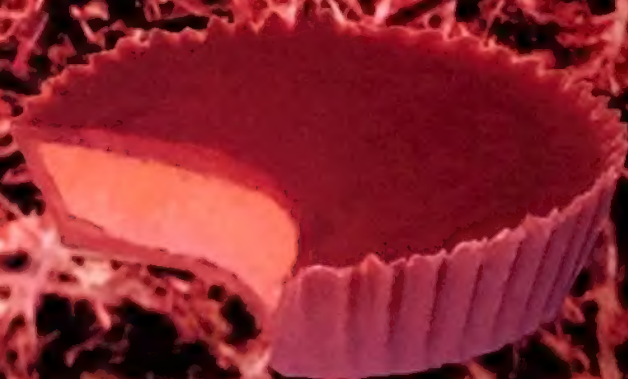
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